

# Caterpillar Summer



*Caterpillar Summer* Reading Guide by Gillian McDunn

BLOOMSBURY 

# A NOTE FROM GILLIAN McDUNN

Hello Readers,

Thank you for downloading the *Caterpillar Summer* reading guide!

Besides being an author, I am an avid reader and book club participant. In fact, the only thing I love more than reading a great book is discussing that book with friends.

I created this guide to help provide a jumping-off point for discussions for classes and reading groups.

These questions are divided into sections that correspond with the book. You can read the questions as you go along or save them all for the end. Where possible, I have included page numbers for easy reference.

**Important: This guide contains spoilers,** so use caution if reading ahead!

- Does your group love hands-on exploration? If so, be sure to check out the included extension activities!
- Does your group love to match foods with a book? Check out the menu page, which contains a list of foods that appear in *Caterpillar Summer*.
- Want to know more about the book? Check out the included FAQ.

Please remember that adults should supervise all activities, especially those involving food, crafting materials, or Internet research.

I love hearing from readers! Parents and teachers can post on social media using #CaterpillarSummer and tagging @gillianmcdunn. You can also reach out to me through my website: [www.gillianmcdunn.com](http://www.gillianmcdunn.com)

Happy reading!

Gillian

# ABOUT THE BOOK

This beautifully written, emotional debut perfect for fans of Lynda Mullaly Hunt or Ali Benjamin tells the story of a girl, her special needs brother, and the summer they will never forget.

Cat and her brother Chicken have always had a very special bond—Cat is one of the few people who can keep Chicken happy. When he has a “meltdown” she’s the one who scratches his back and reads his favorite story. She’s the one who knows what Chicken needs. Since their mom has had to work double-hard to keep their family afloat after their father passed away, Cat has been the glue holding her family together.

But even the strongest glue sometimes struggles to hold. When a summer trip doesn’t go according to plan, Cat and Chicken end up spending three weeks with grandparents they never knew. For the first time in years, Cat has the opportunity to be a kid again. The journey she takes shows that even the most broken or strained relationships can be healed if people take the time to walk in one another’s shoes.

Age range: 8-13

Grade level: 3-8

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An Indies Introduce selection

Kids Indie Next Top Ten for Spring 2019

★ *Kirkus*, starred review

★ *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

A Junior Library Guild selection

A Spring Okra Pick

*Parents Magazine* Best Kids’ Books 2019

*Kirkus* Best Middle-Grade Books of 2019

Texas Bluebonnet Award 2020-2021 Master List

Nominee, South Carolina Children’s Book Award 2020-2021

Nominee, Georgia Children’s Book Award 2021

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GILLIAN McDUNN (pronounced “Jillian”) has loved to read and write for as long as she can remember. She grew up in Orange County, California, and was the oldest of three children. She has also lived in San Francisco, San Diego, St. Louis (go Cards!), and currently lives near Raleigh, North Carolina. Gillian still loves to read and write. She also loves to spend time with her family playing board games, going on road trips, and walking on the beach.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What inspired *Caterpillar Summer*?

A: *Caterpillar Summer* was inspired by my relationship with my brother Andy, who was born with severe disabilities. Chicken’s special needs are very different from Andy’s, but I hoped to capture the big-sister/little-brother relationship that is woven through with love and responsibility. I was also inspired by my love of the beach—especially the North Carolina coast.

Q: Why did you choose *Caterpillar Summer* for the title?

A: Caterpillar is Cat’s family nickname—one that she isn’t sure she wants to keep anymore. It’s also a word that hints at change . . . and this summer is one where a lot of change happens!

Q: Did you ever go fishing when you were a kid?

A: The first time I went fishing was as an adult, after moving to North Carolina. I love sitting with my kids, waiting for the pull on the line. I also love the conversations we have when we are side by side, looking out at the water!

Q: Do you have any advice for young writers?

A: My advice for writers of all ages is to do all the reading and writing you can. Read widely, across genres, because being a good reader will also help with your writing. Write as much as you can—with the expectation that a big part of writing is revising. My books go through many rounds of revision before they reach the shelves.

# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

You've probably heard that you should never judge a book by its cover—and that's true! But covers can also give us hints about what happens inside. Before you begin reading, take a look at the cover and see what you can infer about the story.

Look at the cover of *Caterpillar Summer*. Where do you think the book takes place? What time of year do you think it is? What do you think about the relationship between the two characters? Can you guess whether they may have some special interests?

Read the copy inside the front flap. This is a story about relationships within a family and the changes that happen over a summer vacation. What other stories can you name that are about family? Do you think changes are more likely to happen in summertime? (Why or why not?)

## A Note On Structure

*Caterpillar Summer* is divided into five parts. Each page opens with an illustration and a quote from one of Mom's *Caterpillar & Chicken* picture books. The characters in Mom's books are based closely on Cat (Caterpillar) and Chicken (Chicken).

As you read, pay attention to Cat's feelings about these excerpts.



# PART ONE: End & Begin

1. The first line of the book is: “Cat always kept her brother in the back of her mind, except for the times he was at the front of it.” What does it mean to keep something in the back of your mind? What does it mean to keep something at the front of it?
2. Why does Cat watch Chicken every day after school? Where did they often go before Rishi’s family moved away?
3. On pages 22-23, pages from a Caterpillar & Chicken book appear. What was the inspiration for this story? How has the character of Caterpillar changed over time?
4. On page 34, Chicken has a meltdown when it is time to leave the plane. Cat’s mom says “No, sir,” and Cat says that Southern people are more polite when they get mad. Do you know people who get more polite when they are mad? (For example, calling a child by their full name?) Why do you think that is?
5. When Mom calls Cat “the glue,” what does she mean?
6. In what ways is Cat surprised when she arrives at Macon and Lily’s house?



## Extension Activity: Using Maps to Explore Settings

Cat and Chicken have a lot of freedom to explore in their San Francisco neighborhood, which is called the “Inner Richmond.” Many of the places mentioned can be found using Google Maps or Google Earth. With adult supervision, try mapping:

*544 Cabrillo Street, Frank McCoppin Elementary School,  
Green Apple Books, and Toy Boat Dessert Cafe.*

Zoom out to see how far their apartment is from the Steinhart Aquarium (California Academy of Sciences).

**How many blocks is their house from Ocean Beach?**

After plans with Rishi’s family fall through, Mom takes Cat and Chicken to Gingerbread Island in North Carolina. This is not a real place but was based closely on Topsail Island in North Carolina. Use your mapping tool to locate Topsail Island.

**What are some differences you notice between San Francisco and Topsail Island?  
How far apart are they?**



## Extension Activity: Pack It Up, Pack It In

**Cat's family oversleeps and they have to pack in a hurry!  
Can you play this game to help with their packing list?**

For this activity, you need a die with all the letters of the alphabet on it (or access to an online random letter generator) and copies of the list below. After the random letter is determined, players have 3 minutes to fill out the sheet. Answers may contain any number of words, but each answer must begin with the assigned letter. (Example: for clothing and the letter C you could write cap, coat, or cowboy boots.)

**Scoring:** After the time is up, players read their answers.

Zero points awarded if anyone has the same answer, 1 point if the answer is unique.  
When you are finished, you can choose another letter and play again using the same list.

1. Clothing
2. Game or app
3. Something you take to the beach
4. Snack
5. Book title
6. Toy
7. Things on an airplane
8. Sea creature
9. Someplace you want to visit
10. Lollipop flavor



## PART TWO: Bad & Good

1. Cat wants to find the clues to explain why Mom left Gingerbread Island and hasn't been back. What are some things she finds that might help explain what happened?
2. How are Macon and Lily alike and different?
3. Lily says "holding a family together is a quiet kind of work. Sometimes that work doesn't get noticed so much" (78). What do you think that means?
4. What does Cat think about what John Harvey and the other boys are doing at the beach? What does John Harvey think about what she says and does? What do you think you would have done if you were Cat? If you were John Harvey?
5. Chicken has a specific reason for running into the waves, a reason that his grandparents and Cat don't understand at first. What is it?
6. On page 102, Macon says "half of life is showing up." What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree?
7. What are some reasons Cat decides to enter the fishing contest?



## Extension Activity: Sea Turtle Exploration

Macon walks the beach every day “rain or shine,” looking for evidence of sea turtle nests. With adult supervision, read about sea turtles on the North Carolina coast. Two sites to get you started are The NC Sea Turtle Project and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Create a poster showing ways beachgoers can help keep sea turtles safe. Print out a coloring page about sea turtles to share with your friends.

## Extension Activity: Misunderstandings

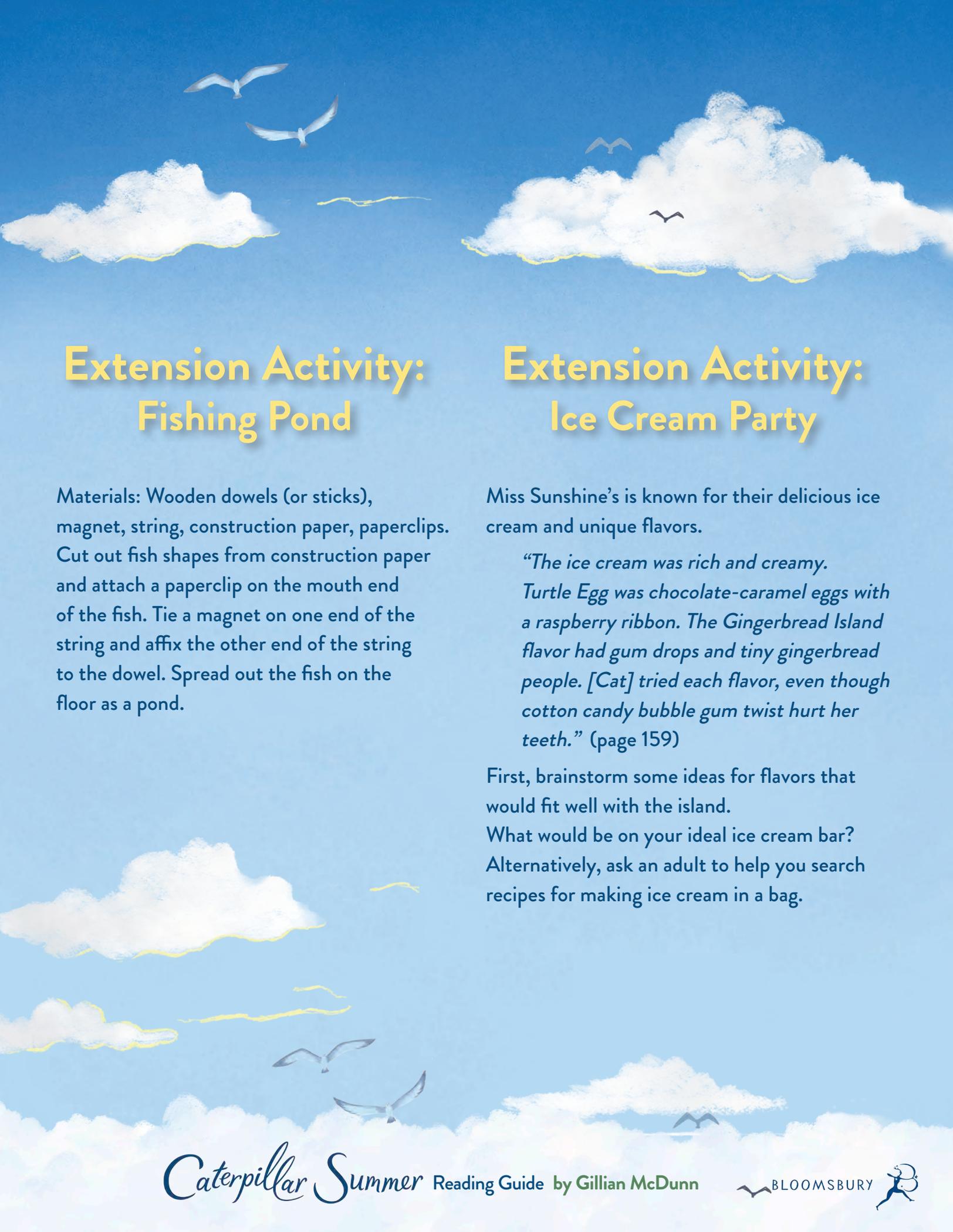
Cat’s feelings are hurt when Macon doesn’t want to go on a walk with her. Later, she learns that he used that time to fix up the bike. With a partner, find an example of a misunderstanding in Part Two. Each person will write a letter from the point of view of one character to the other character explaining their perspective. Use examples from the text to make your letter strong.

(Ideas for partners: Cat and Harriet, Cat and Chicken, Cat and John Harvey, Cat and Macon, Cat and Mom.)



## PART THREE: Gather & Hunt

1. Harriet says that Cat needs to turn her luck around, so she recommends a night-time activity on the beach. What is it? Do you think it sounds like fun? Lily says she'll participate only if Chicken promises something—what is it and why is it important?
2. On the pier, John Harvey overhears some unkind words from Cat and Harriet. How does Cat react when she sees him? Do you think their comments were justified or did they go too far?
3. One rainy day, Cat and Macon go to Miss Sunshine's for ice cream. Cat arrives first and has a very unfriendly experience with the shop owner. How did Cat feel? What did Macon do when he got there? How does this relate to the idea of Southern people getting more polite when they are really mad?
4. Why does Macon decide to teach Cat what he knows about fishing? Why does he say “no promises”?
5. What happens to Cat's bike when she is at Willis General? What do you think you would do if that happened to you? Were you surprised that she didn't tell Macon that she suspected John Harvey? (Why or why not?)
6. Cat and Chicken get to read an early copy of *Caterpillar & Chicken: The Best Hat*. How do their different reactions show their points of view?



## Extension Activity: Fishing Pond

Materials: Wooden dowels (or sticks), magnet, string, construction paper, paperclips. Cut out fish shapes from construction paper and attach a paperclip on the mouth end of the fish. Tie a magnet on one end of the string and affix the other end of the string to the dowel. Spread out the fish on the floor as a pond.

## Extension Activity: Ice Cream Party

Miss Sunshine's is known for their delicious ice cream and unique flavors.

*"The ice cream was rich and creamy. Turtle Egg was chocolate-caramel eggs with a raspberry ribbon. The Gingerbread Island flavor had gum drops and tiny gingerbread people. [Cat] tried each flavor, even though cotton candy bubble gum twist hurt her teeth."* (page 159)

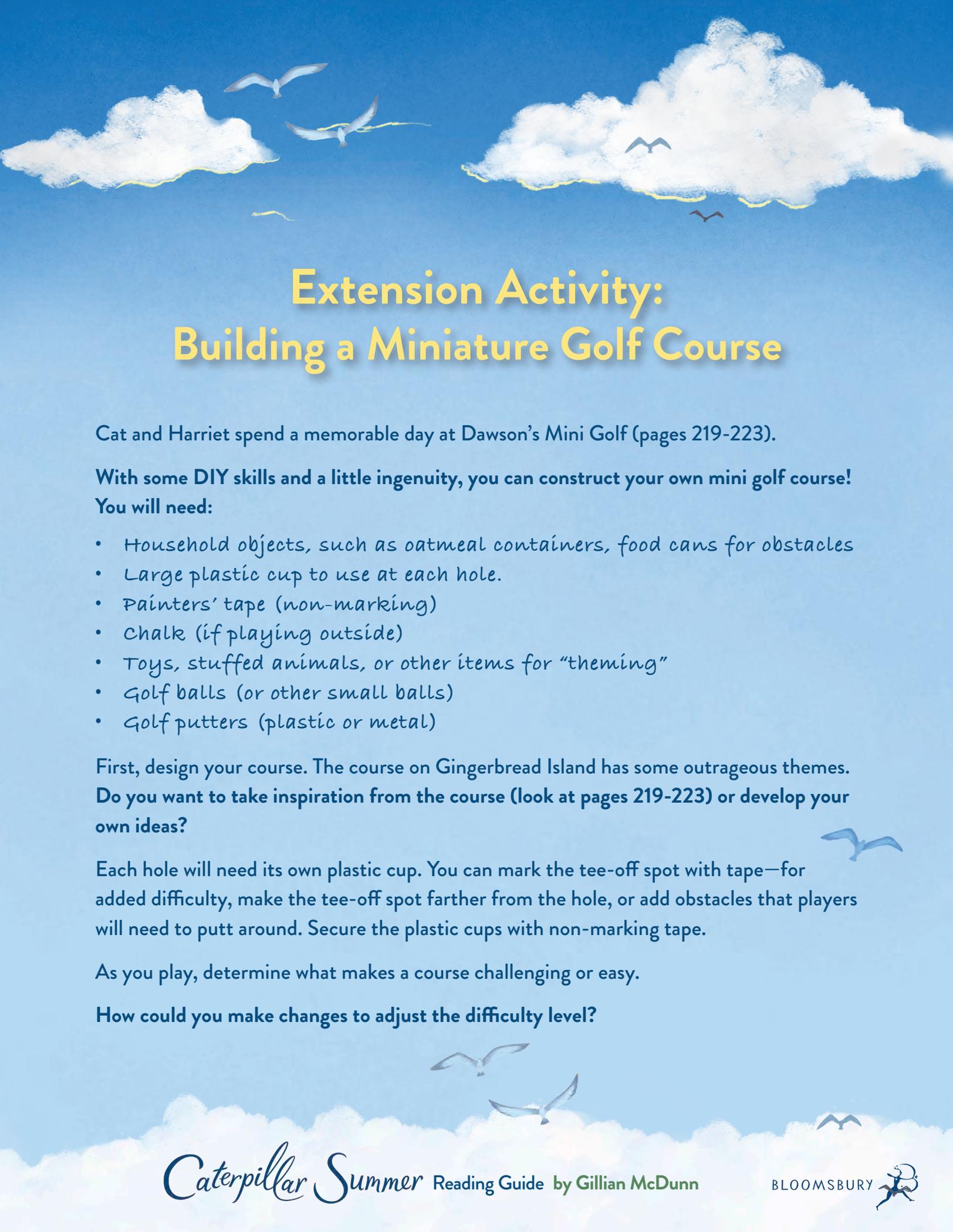
First, brainstorm some ideas for flavors that would fit well with the island.

What would be on your ideal ice cream bar? Alternatively, ask an adult to help you search recipes for making ice cream in a bag.



## PART FOUR: Answers & Questions

1. In Chapter 19, Cat asks Macon some tough questions. What did you think of his answers?
2. Cat talks about being sad about her dad “backward and forward.” (page 190-191) What does this mean?
3. In this section, John Harvey surprises Cat a few times. First at the playground, and then at the parade. Are Cat’s thoughts about John Harvey changing or staying the same? What do you think of him as a character?
4. At the Fourth of July dinner, Harriet says to Cat: “I know you look after [Chicken]. But sometimes letting him handle things is a way of looking out for him, too.” What do you think of this observation? How are Harriet and Neddie similar and dissimilar to Cat and Chicken?
5. Cat gets to talk with Rishi in Chapter 27. She thinks that “sometimes sharing with Rishi made things feel more real” (page 229). Do you have someone like that in your life?
6. Someone challenges Cat’s entry because she doesn’t live on the island year-round (page 231). What do you think of this challenge?



## Extension Activity: Building a Miniature Golf Course

Cat and Harriet spend a memorable day at Dawson's Mini Golf (pages 219-223).

**With some DIY skills and a little ingenuity, you can construct your own mini golf course!**

**You will need:**

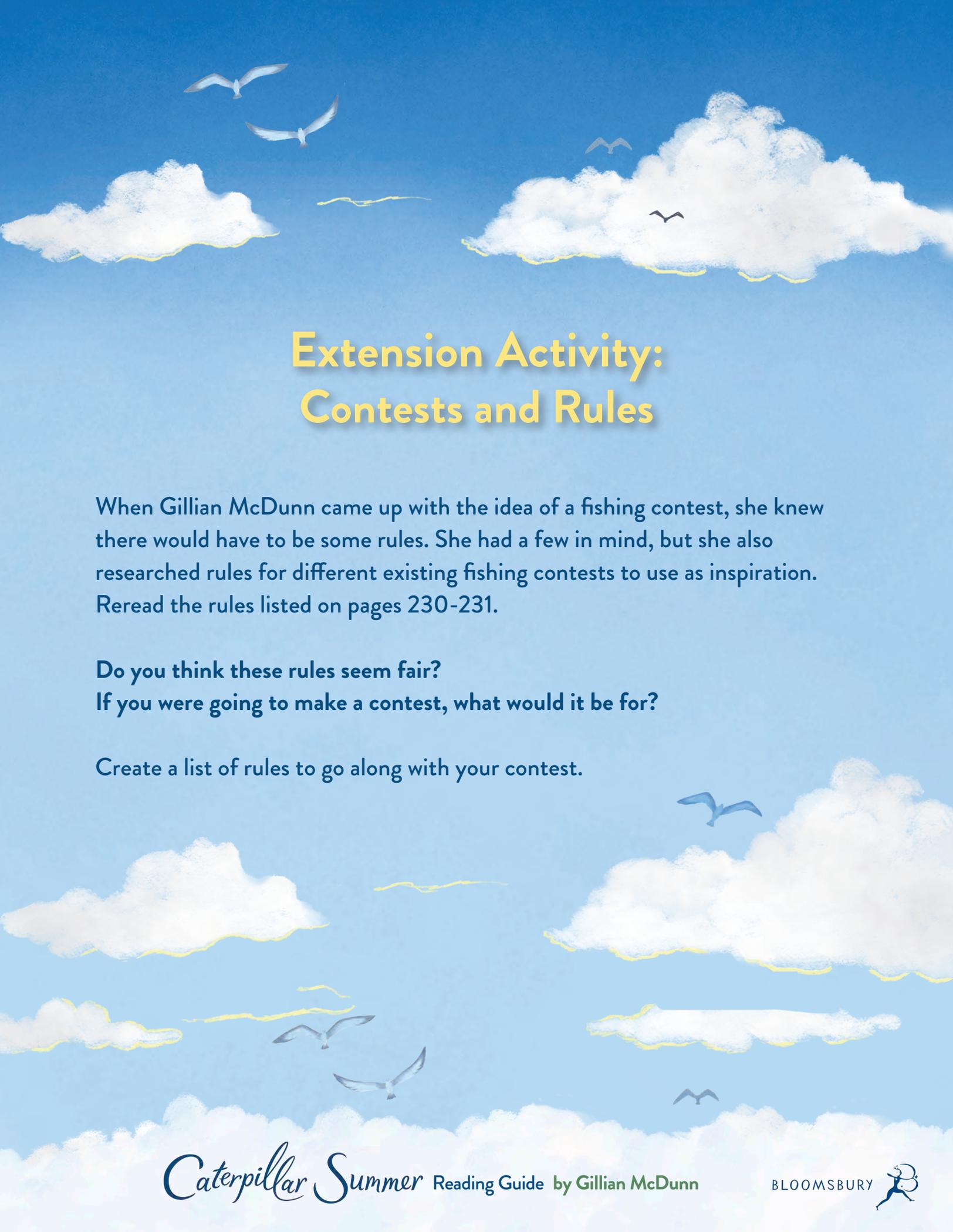
- Household objects, such as oatmeal containers, food cans for obstacles
- Large plastic cup to use at each hole.
- Painters' tape (non-marking)
- Chalk (if playing outside)
- Toys, stuffed animals, or other items for "theming"
- Golf balls (or other small balls)
- Golf putters (plastic or metal)

First, design your course. The course on Gingerbread Island has some outrageous themes. Do you want to take inspiration from the course (look at pages 219-223) or develop your own ideas?

Each hole will need its own plastic cup. You can mark the tee-off spot with tape—for added difficulty, make the tee-off spot farther from the hole, or add obstacles that players will need to putt around. Secure the plastic cups with non-marking tape.

As you play, determine what makes a course challenging or easy.

**How could you make changes to adjust the difficulty level?**

The background of the page is a bright blue sky filled with fluffy white clouds. Several seagulls are scattered throughout the sky, some in flight and others perched on clouds. The clouds have a soft, painterly texture with yellowish highlights at their bases.

## Extension Activity: Contests and Rules

When Gillian McDunn came up with the idea of a fishing contest, she knew there would have to be some rules. She had a few in mind, but she also researched rules for different existing fishing contests to use as inspiration. Reread the rules listed on pages 230-231.

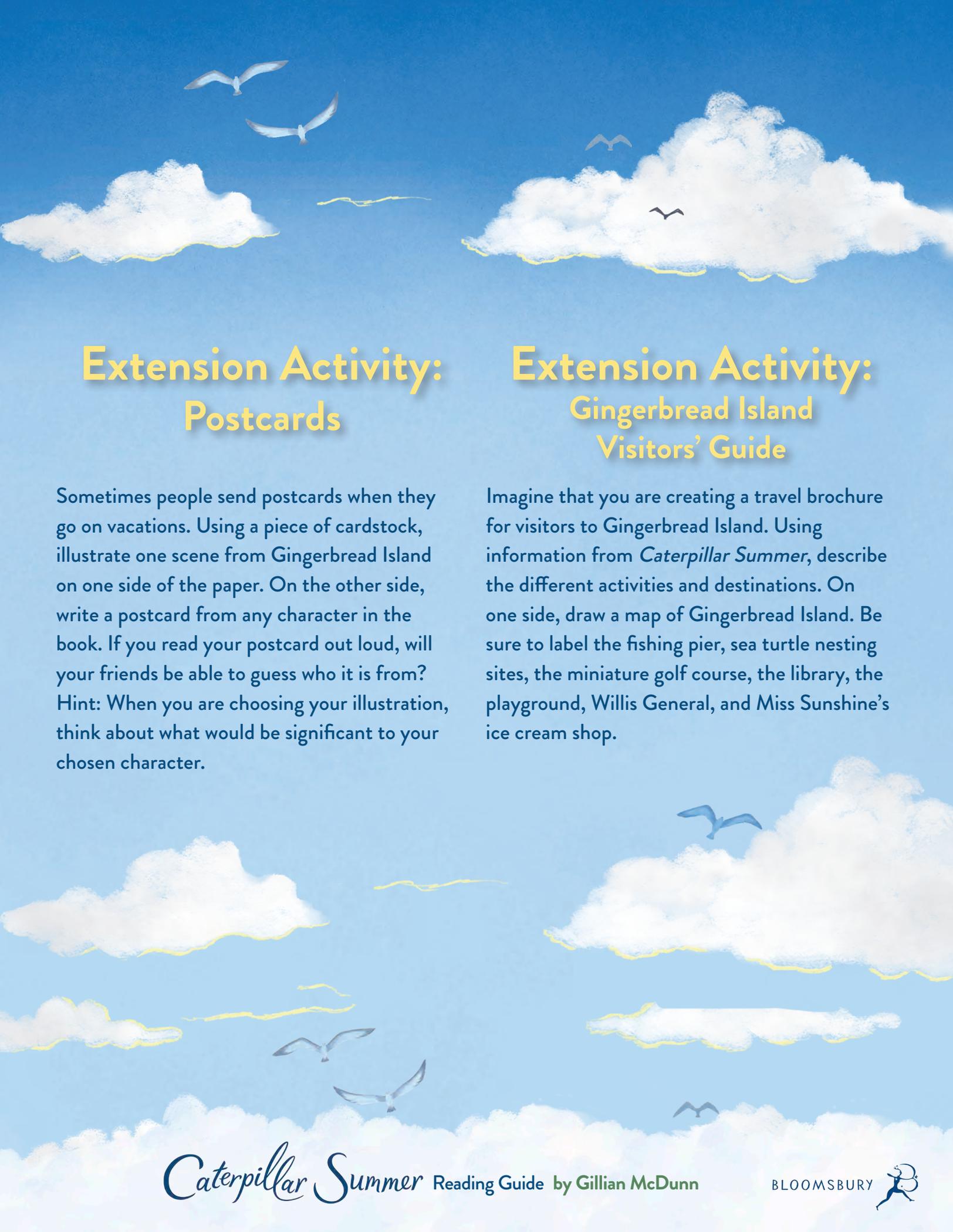
**Do you think these rules seem fair?  
If you were going to make a contest, what would it be for?**

Create a list of rules to go along with your contest.



## PART FIVE: Before & After

1. The kids try lots of new foods when they are on Gingerbread Island. At the fishing contest, they try hush puppies for the first time. Do you have foods you associate with certain places? Do you like trying new things? Has a new food ever surprised you?
2. What is John Harvey's relationship with his brothers like?
3. How did you feel when you heard about what John Harvey had done to increase his chances of catching fish?
4. Did you think Cat would win the fishing contest?
5. What did you think of all the people coming to help look for Chicken? How was it different from when Chicken is lost in the first chapter of the book? Did you have a guess as to where he would be?
6. On page 78, Lily says that "holding a family together is a quiet kind of work" but on page 276 she says "sometimes it's exactly the opposite." Why has her opinion changed? What other characters have changed their mind? About what?
7. Why does Cat go to see John Harvey? What does she think about him in the end?



## Extension Activity: Postcards

Sometimes people send postcards when they go on vacations. Using a piece of cardstock, illustrate one scene from *Gingerbread Island* on one side of the paper. On the other side, write a postcard from any character in the book. If you read your postcard out loud, will your friends be able to guess who it is from? Hint: When you are choosing your illustration, think about what would be significant to your chosen character.

## Extension Activity: Gingerbread Island Visitors' Guide

Imagine that you are creating a travel brochure for visitors to Gingerbread Island. Using information from *Caterpillar Summer*, describe the different activities and destinations. On one side, draw a map of Gingerbread Island. Be sure to label the fishing pier, sea turtle nesting sites, the miniature golf course, the library, the playground, Willis General, and Miss Sunshine's ice cream shop.

# CATERPILLAR SUMMER MENU

Food is mentioned several times in the book—first in San Francisco, when Cat and Chicken visit the “other” Chinatown on Clement Street, then on the island with Lily and Macon. Rishi and Cat share memories of food, too. At times, is food a way of connecting with someone? Are there foods that you associate with certain people?

Some groups like to serve themed food at their book clubs. Below I’ve collected a list of some of the foods mentioned in *Caterpillar Summer*. Please double-check for allergies and intolerances before sharing with friends.

## In San Francisco, from the Chinese bakery

Sesame buns

*Chicken loved the sesame-crust buns with sweet bean paste nestled inside. (p. 8-10)*

Pineapple buns

*Her pineapple bun was in its own bag, which she held carefully as she walked back outside to the cool afternoon. (p. 10)*

## In the Airport

Hamburgers, soft fries, hot sauce

*Cat gave Chicken the soft fries from her bag because he didn’t like the crisp ones. (p. 30)*

## On Gingerbread Island

Pimento cheese

*Lily called it pimento cheese, but Cat was suspicious. (p. 143)*

Hush puppies

*“Never thought a granddaughter of mine wouldn’t know what a hush puppy is!” (p. 242)*

# CATERPILLAR SUMMER MENU

## On Gingerbread Island

Fried fish

*“We’ll have it for lunch then.” Lily peered inside the pantry. “I’m out of cornmeal—are you up for a trip to Willis General?” (p. 167)*

Biscuits

*“That’s that,” said Lily. “Now let’s have some biscuits.” (p. 59)*

Sweet tea (iced)

*Hot tea on a summer day sounded terrible, but Lily opened the fridge and pulled out a pitcher. “It’s half-sweet, how you like it.” (p. 58)*

Pink lemonade

*“This lemonade sure is good, Mrs. Gladwell,” said Harriet. (p. 206)*

## With Rishi

Dosas

*It had been a year, but Cat still missed going to Rishi’s house to play, do homework, and eat dosas. (p. 4)*

Gulab jamun

*Rishi’s face looked dreamy.*

*“Gulab jamun? They’re even better than my mom’s.” (p. 228)*

## Dessert

Puzzle cookies

*“Chicken,” she said. “Why do you think book-Caterpillar solved the problem that way?” (p. 97)*

Ice cream

*She tried each flavor, even though cotton candy bubble gum twist hurt her teeth. (p. 159)*