



Big Mouth

by Deborah Halverson

A big boy with a big dream

Fourteen-year-old Shermie Thuff wants to be the fastest, richest, most famous competitive eater in the world . . . all he has to do is eat 54 hot dogs in 12 minutes.

“Funny, touching, and deeply gross.... Good fun!”

—Bruce Hale, author of the Chet Gecko series

Delacorte Press, 2008, ages 12+, isbn 978-0-385-73394-6, www.randomhouse.com/teens

Questions for discussion:

Have you ever seen an eating competition? Why do you think it fascinates people even as it grosses them out?

Shermie says competitive eating is a “sport” and competitive eaters are “athletes.” Do you agree? How would you define “sport” and “athlete”? Is chess a sport? How about pillow fighting, or lawnmower racing, or spitting for distance? Would competitive reading be a sport?

Why does Shermie idolize Captain Quixote? Why do people need heroes? Who are your heroes? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?

Shermie’s fame gains him friends. It also loses him some. Is the tradeoff worth it? What are the pros and cons of fame? Would you make that trade?

It’s easy to obsess about something you love. Do you think Shermie, Gardo, and Lucy go too far with their interests? How far is too far? On a scale of 1 to 10, how extreme are you about the thing you love?

The title *Big Mouth* is as much about loyalty to friends as it is about eating. Ultimately, Shermie faces a choice: keep his friend or get that friend help. Would you make the same choice as Shermie? Have you ever been in a similar spot with a friend? If you had it to do over again, would you make the same call?

Secrets swirl around Del Heiny Jr. High #13. Under what circumstances is it okay to tell a secret? Has anyone ever told one of your secrets? How did it make you feel? Looking back, do you think they were right tell?

Do you think they nabbed the real Mustard Tagger? If not, who do you think the real Mustard Tagger is?

Shermie adopts the “Whatever on Saturday” rule. Do you think it’s a good one? Why or why not? Do you think Shermie can hold out week after week? Could *you* hold out until Saturday?

Shermie loves food but learns that there are extremes at each end of the eating spectrum—eating too much and eating too little. Brainstorm pressures that lead people to eating extremes. Visit www.NationalEatingDisorders.org.

What makes Mad Max so easy to talk to? Which teachers or adults would you turn to in a time of crisis? Why?

Shermie likes to imagine the commercials he’ll star in when he’s a famous athlete. If you wrote a commercial about yourself, what would you sell? Which commercial jingle best suits your personality and interests?

Grampy is stumped by 15 across in his crossword puzzle: “a six-letter word for red hot in the land without shadows.” Do *you* know the answer?

www.DeborahHalverson.com * fansite: www.IamThuffEnuff.com * Also check out HONK IF YOU HATE ME