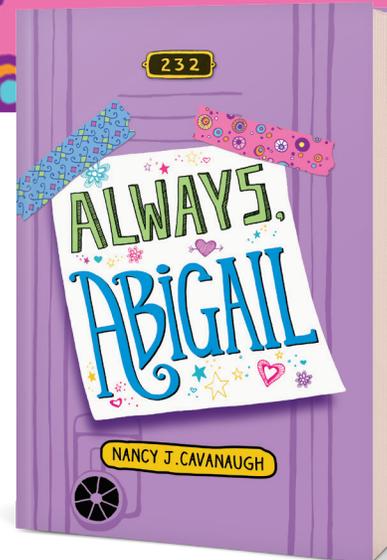


Always, Abigail

By Nancy J. Cavanaugh



Introduction

When using the following activities with a whole group or a small group (2-5 students), student responses can be discussed as a class and/or recorded on the board. To use these activities with a single student as an independent study, a spiral notebook or novel study folder can be used to record the student's responses.

Snapshot Summary

Abigail dreams of being a pom-pom girl, but when sixth grade doesn't turn out the way she planned, she finds herself having to choose between the little bit of popularity she has left or being a real friend.



About the Author

Nancy J. Cavanaugh lives in Florida with her husband and daughter. She spends summers eating pizza in her former hometown of Chicago. *Always, Abigail* is her second middle-grade novel. Her debut, *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet*, earned a *Kirkus* star—"A book that is full of surprises...Triumphant enough to make readers cheer; touching enough to make them cry."

Like Abigail, Nancy enjoys writing lists. Her secret to turning an unproductive day into one she can feel proud of is writing a few things on her "To Do" list which she has already accomplished, just so she can cross them out.

In the past, Nancy's lists helped her stay organized as an elementary and middle school teacher and also a library media specialist. Presently her lists help her organize her life as a writer. Nancy enjoys doing school visits and writers' workshops as well as sharing teaching ideas with librarians and teachers at conferences. **Visit her at www.NancyJCavanaugh.com for more information.**

Full-Length Summary

When Abigail's dreams of becoming a pom-pom girl are dashed, she finds herself in the unlikely situation of having to choose between her two best friends and the school's biggest outcast.

Always, Abigail begins with Abigail and her two best friends, Alli and Cami, (a.k.a. AlliCam) poised for a long life of pom-poms and popularity. But for Abigail, her own insecurities and lack of confidence—coupled with her bad luck of being assigned to a different homeroom than AlliCam—make for a rough start to sixth grade. Abigail uses her list writing to calm herself down and keep her anxiety at bay, which is why she tells her story through lists and letters.

Being assigned to a different homeroom than AlliCam is only the beginning of her bad luck. What makes it worse is that Miss Hendrick, (a.k.a. Old Hawk) is her homeroom teacher. Old Hawk is the toughest, strictest teacher at Crestdale Heights. But even that's not the worst of it. Old Hawk is also Abigail's language arts teacher, and Old Hawk's friendly letter assignment is what almost pushes Abigail over the edge. Old Hawk assigns Abigail to be friendly letter partners with Gabby Marco—the biggest outcast at Crestdale Heights. Being partners with Gabby is something that could ruin a person's life.

Abigail's misery continues to grow as she feels herself being left out with AlliCam because of their inside jokes that don't include her. Abigail's lack of confidence about being good enough for poms grows until she's unsure if she'll even make the squad.

To her surprise and relief, Abigail does well at tryouts. She's thrilled to see her name posted on the squad roster. She's even more thrilled when the other girls tell her the asterisks by her name probably means she'll be named squad captain. Abigail finds out later what the asterisks really means—she's an alternate, which means she's really not a pom-pom girl at all. Her dreams of pom-poms and popularity are crushed in an instant, and as a result, she loses touch with AlliCam as they begin spending their time practicing poms and hanging out with the other girls on the squad.

Abigail finds herself with nothing to do and no one to do it with. So in an effort to earn some much-needed extra credit points from Old Hawk, she ends up helping her teacher clean out a cabinet in her classroom. Volunteering to help her teacher is bad enough, but what makes it worse is that Gabby Marco volunteers too. The two friendly letter partners, who aren't really friends at all, find themselves having to work very closely together. But to protect what little popularity she has left, Abigail keeps her distance from Gabby as best she can. Surprisingly though, the two girls find they have a common love of books, so they begin to connect as they sort through Old Hawk's pile of old picture books. Eventually Old Hawk has the two girls partnered up to do a storytelling for the kindergarten class down the hall. Abigail keeps her involvement with Gabby on the down low so that AlliCam and the other students don't realize the truth—that Abigail and Gabby are becoming more than just friendly letter partners.

As Abigail and Gabby prepare for their first visit to the kindergarten class, they actually begin to enjoy spending time together. But just after their first storytelling session is a smash hit, Abigail's circumstances change drastically: one of the pom girls get injured and is out for the rest of the season. Abigail goes from being an alternate to being a real pom-pom girl—her dreams are finally coming true!

Abigail's excitement is off the charts. This is exactly what she's been waiting for, and her life changes in an instant. She's hanging out with the pom squad. Kip Thompson, the cutest boy in seventh grade, is noticing her, and she's enjoying school popularity at last. The problem is that in order to keep up with the poms, she finds herself having to let go of her blossoming friendship with Gabby. The two worlds just don't mix.

Abigail wants to enjoy the popular happy pom life. After all, she's been waiting for it since third grade. But she finds that her Gabby Guilt is ruining it for her. She feels guilty as she blows Gabby off over and over again. Not only that, now when other kids bully Gabby, it's hard for Abigail to ignore it. During the time they spent together, Gabby confided in Abigail about her mom dying when Gabby was in third grade and about her dad being in jail. Abigail is the only one who knows how badly Gabby needs a friend, but Abigail cannot find the courage to do what she knows is right. So she walks away from Gabby once and for all.

For a few short days, Abigail finds herself enjoying what she's always dreamed about—preparing for the pom squad yearbook photo, anticipating the possibility of her first kiss from Kip, and looking forward to going to her first middle school party. The problem is that, even in the midst of the good times, that quiet place within Abigail lets her know she has to find the courage to: stand up for Gabby and stand up for herself. That moment finally comes when the popular people at school make fun of Gabby publicly in such a way that Abigail can't possibly stand by and let it happen. She becomes a live, active volcano and explodes—letting everyone at Crestdale Heights know, through her outburst, that it's not okay to make fun of Gabby Marco. Abigail doesn't stop there. She goes to pom practice that day and quits the squad because she knows that's the only real way to stand up for herself.

Abigail apologizes to Gabby for all the crummy things she's done, and even though she knows Gabby may not forgive her, she knows she's finally done the right thing. Gabby does forgive Abigail. The story ends with Abigail and Gabby being poised for a long life of friendship and storytelling, and Abigail finally feels like herself.

Pre-Reading

For whole class group or small group, these pre-reading questions may be used in a group discussion with students' predictions recorded on the board. For the independent reader, a spiral notebook can be used to record student's predictions.

Using the questions below, discuss what information readers are able to gather by reading and looking at the front and back cover of the book.

Making Predictions:

1. What is the book about?
2. Will the story be happy or sad?
3. What conclusions are you able to make about the characters in the story?

Next, have students silently read the first five lists in *Always, Abigail* or read them aloud as a class. Then use the following questions to discuss where the story might be heading.

1. Who is telling the story? What clues help us answer that question? How will that point of view influence the way the story is told? (Point of View)
2. What do we know about what has already happened to the main character? What do we know about her personality? Her strengths? Her weaknesses? (Backstory)
3. What problem(s) does Abigail face? What is her biggest problem? (Story Problem)
4. What do you think will happen to Abigail next? How will she handle what comes her way? (Prediction)

Common Core Connections: Reading/Craft and Structure RL 3.6, 4.6, 5.5, 5.6, 6.5, 6.6

During Reading

While Reading *Always, Abigail*:

- Choose and record five vocabulary words from the story. (Think about words Old Hawk might choose if she were teaching a unit on this book.) After looking up the definition of each word and recording it, write a sentence about each character in the book (Abigail, Alli, Cami, Old Hawk, Jackson), using one vocabulary word in each sentence.
- Make a list of reasons why Abigail would be a good friend. Make another list of reasons why Abigail would not make a good friend. Keep adding to each list as you read more and more of the story.
- Make a list of questions you would ask the author if you had the opportunity to talk with her about the book.

Common Core Connections: Reading/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3;
Language/Vocabulary Acquisition and Use L 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4

More Writing Activities:

- After reading approximately a third of the book, write a list describing the main character. Write a list describing one of the secondary characters. Write a list of things you would like to find out about the story. Choose one of your lists and write a descriptive paragraph or essay using what you have written. (Descriptive Writing)
- After reading approximately two-thirds of the book, write a list of similarities between you and Abigail. Write a list of differences between you and Abigail. Choose what character you are most like and write a list of reasons why. Using details from your lists, write a paragraph or essay comparing yourself to one of the characters in the book. (Comparison and Contrast)
- After finishing *Always, Abigail*, write a letter to Abigail. Then write a reply to the letter you wrote as if Abigail were writing a response to you. (Practicing Point of View)

Common Core Connections: Reading/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3; Reading/Craft and Structure RL 3.6, 4.6, 5.6, 6.6;
Writing/Text Types and Purposes W 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2

After Reading

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why does Abigail hate being in Old Hawk's homeroom?
 - a. Her classroom is too small.
 - b. AlliCam are not in Old Hawk's homeroom.
 - c. Old Hawk has the rowdiest students in her homeroom.
 - d. Abigail had Old Hawk for a teacher in fifth grade.

2. What does the * by Abigail's name mean on the pom roster?
 - a. She's the captain.
 - b. She's the best pom.
 - c. She's an alternate.
 - d. She gets to move up to the Varsity Squad.

3. Why does Abigail volunteer to help Old Hawk after school?
 - a. She needs extra credit points in language arts, and she's bored.
 - b. She needs extra credit points in language arts, and she wants to be the teacher's pet.
 - c. She needs extra credit points in language arts, and she loves to clean.
 - d. She needs extra credit points in language arts, and she wants to make friends with Gabby Marco.

4. Abigail finally gets to be a real pom-pom girl because...
 - a. She practices and gets better.
 - b. Ms. Jensen decides to make the squad bigger.
 - c. Alicia Brenton breaks her leg.
 - d. Kip Thompson puts in a good word for her.

5. Abigail apologizes to Gabby by giving her a copy of...
 - a. *The Gingerbread Man*.
 - b. *Green Eggs and Ham*.
 - c. *Hatchet*.
 - d. *The Little Engine that Could*.

Answers: b, c, a, c, d

Common Core Connections: Reading/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Discussion Questions:

1. Do the characters in *Always, Abigail* remind you of people you know? If yes, who and why?
2. In what ways does Abigail change from the beginning of the book to the end?
3. Why is Gabby Marco so unaffected by the teasing and bullying?
4. Why does Jackson Dawber bully people? Why does he stop?
5. Why do the pom girls tease and bully? Do you think they'll stop?
6. In what ways are Abigail and AlliCam alike? In what ways are they different?
7. Which character in the book would you like to be friends with?
8. How does Abigail feel about Old Hawk at the beginning of the book? How does she feel at the end? Why do her feelings change?
9. Do you think Abigail and Gabby would have become friends without the friendly letter assignment? At what point in the story do you think they really become friends?
10. Why does it take Abigail such a long time to do the right thing? Do you think that happens in real life?
11. Do the events in *Always, Abigail* remind you of things that have happened in your own life or at your own school?
12. Being on the pom squad didn't turn out the way Abigail planned. Has anything like that ever happened to you?

Common Core Connections: Reading/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.3, 4.2, 4.3, 5.2, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3

Further Study

These activities would work well for large group and small group novel studies, but they would also work especially well for one student doing an independent novel study or for two students working on *Always, Abigail* as a partner study.

Writing:

- Have students choose a favorite picture book or folktale, practice storytelling it, and then perform it for the class or for a class of younger students the way Abigail and Gabby did.
- Assign students email pen pals. Use students in another classroom for partners or team up with another school in your district.
- Have students write pretend pen pal letters by making up two different fictional characters and having them write letters to each other.

Common Core Connections: Writing/Range of Writing W 3.10, 4.10, 5.10, 6.10

Reading:

- Have students research other novels that focus on bullying and make a list of books on bullying. After reading one or more of the books on their list, have them do a five-minute book talk for the class about the book(s).

Common Core Connections: Reading/Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL 3.9, 4.9, 5.9, 6.9

Cross-Curriculum Connections**Math:**

- Have students conduct a bully survey by asking classmates if they have ever felt like: the bully, the victim, or the bystander. Have students create a bar graph showing survey results.

Social Studies:

- Have students research the history of storytelling or the origin of a specific folktale. Have students find a way to present their research finding to their classmates.

Drama:

- Have students write and perform a mock interview regarding bullying (the interviewer can ask questions to a bully, a victim, and a bystander).

Art:

- Have students design a postcard to illustrate the themes in *Always, Abigail*.
- Have students design an anti-bullying brochure. Include a list of books with themes that focus on bullying.