

Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

The Mystery Ingredient

Reading Guide

As you read, consider the kind of language the author of this story uses. Does the dialogue sound like a conversation you or someone you know might have?

How does Leona work toward her goal of being a chef?

What do you learn about Leona in this section?

Daniel Fiore. Leona had first heard that name when she was a teenager, helping her grandmother bake a braided loaf of bread swirled with cinnamon. As the bread filled the kitchen with its irresistibly sweet scent, Leona and her grandmother switched on the TV to watch Daniel Fiore bake his own beautiful creation. Back then, not too many people knew his name—he had just graduated from culinary school at the top of his class, and he'd landed a small TV show on a local channel in Leona's hometown.

Leona's grandmother, who was quite a cook herself, though she'd never had the time or the funds to go to culinary school, pointed at the TV. "This young man is special," she told Leona, "He's never steered me wrong in the kitchen. In fact, this bread we're baking is one of his recipes."

Cooking with her grandmother was one of Leona's favorite things to do, and soon Daniel Fiore was *her* favorite chef as well. Together, she and her grandmother watched proudly as he became more and more successful. By the time Leona graduated high school, with plans to go to culinary school for college, Chef Fiore's restaurants were packed every night, his cookbooks were bestsellers, and his latest TV show was broadcast worldwide. Leona's secret dream was that if she worked hard enough, maybe one day she could follow in Chef Fiore's footsteps.

A few years after graduating from culinary school, Leona was an apprentice in a kitchen in Italy, learning how to cut homemade ravioli into perfectly shaped squares. On a tiny TV in the corner, an Italian news station played, and Leona was surprised when Daniel Fiore's face popped up. She was struggling to follow the newscaster's Italian when suddenly the camera panned to a video of Chef Fiore, making a statement.

"Due to an ongoing illness, I've decided it's time for me to give up my cooking empire. I have no choice but to step out of the spotlight to take care of myself. It hurts, but I know it's the right decision for my family and me."

Leona froze in shock, her ravioli neglected, as Chef Fiore continued.

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How does the author structure the plot? How does he or she present the conflict?

Notice how Leona acts differently from the other contestants.

"Of course, I won't be turning my back on all my hard work. Next month I'll sponsor a baking contest; the winner will take over my show and run my restaurants."

Leona knew what she had to do: it involved an entry form, a plane ticket, and a once-in-a-lifetime shot at her dream.

One month later, she stood in a TV studio with ten other contestants. They had all made it through the first round, and this time, they would bake something on Chef Fiore's cooking show. Leona watched a TV interviewer go from contestant to contestant. The man next to her stood up straight and faced the camera head-on.

"Nervous? No way. I've been training for years, and I know I've got this."

Leona's hands were clammy, her mouth as dry as cotton. How could this guy be so confident when she felt like fainting? When the microphone reached her, she could barely squeak out a word.

"I'll try my best," she whispered.

After the interviews were over, Chef Fiore walked onstage with a mischievous glint in his eye. From behind his back, he pulled a bottle of clear liquid.

"This bottle," he said dramatically, "contains your mystery ingredient. You can bake whatever you want, but it must use this."

"What is it?" another contestant inquired.

"Chef's secret!" Chef Fiore replied, as he handed the first bottle to Leona.

Leona took her place at her private cooking station; she was relieved that from back here she couldn't see the other contestants. More important, they couldn't see her and make her nervous! The mystery ingredient perplexed Leona, but she didn't have time to think about it. Instead, she got to work on the recipe she'd planned. She would bake a flaky French pastry with roasted strawberries. It was one of her favorites, and it always came out great.

Leona baked her pastry in the usual way, only this time she folded the mystery ingredient into the sugary dough. Then she popped her creation into the oven and waited.

Twenty minutes later, Leona opened the oven to find a disaster: her pastry, which was usually light and flaky, was a flat, burnt pancake. The roasted strawberries had shriveled like raisins and turned brown. It even smelled funny.

"Oh, no," Leona groaned, "Maybe I was nervous and put the oven on too high."

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What does Leona do or say in this section that reminds you of Ling from "The Emperor's Test"?

How would you summarize the events of "The Mystery Ingredient"?

Leona glanced at the countdown clock on the wall. Luckily she had time to try once more. She double-checked the oven temperature and whipped up her pastry at record speed. But twenty minutes later, she was faced with the same, sad lump. When the countdown clock buzzed, she had no choice but to bring her failed dessert to be judged.

When Leona reached the judging area and saw the other contestants' dishes, she felt even worse. There were beautiful pies, sky-high layer cakes, and sugar-dusted cookies, and they all smelled amazing.

Chef Fiore walked from dish to dish, tasting each one.

"Scrumptious," he exclaimed, after a forkful of cake.

"Divine," he said, after a spoonful of pie.

Leona was the last in line, and she could barely stand to watch Chef Fiore taste her creation with a disgusted look on his face.

"Now this one," said Chef Fiore, "is totally gross."

But then, Chef Fiore's face broke into a wide smile. He grabbed Leona's hand and hoisted it into the air. "Ladies and gentleman, we have a winner."

Leona glared at Chef Fiore. "Is this some kind of cruel joke?"

"Absolutely not," he said. Then he turned to the audience. "Let me fill you in on a secret. That mystery ingredient is guaranteed to ruin any recipe. So I know that the only one who actually used it is Leona! The rest of you broke the rules, and you're all disqualified. Leona, next time you'll be hosting this show yourself!"

Answer the following questions about both passages in this lesson.

1 Which of these statements describe how Ling and Leona are alike? Select **all** that apply.

- A. Both are influenced by their grandmothers.
- B. Both are eager to impress someone.
- C. Both are overconfident about the contests they enter.
- D. Both are faced with potential failure.
- E. Both are honest about their mistakes.
- F. Both are willing to cheat in order to win.

2 The following question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

Which of the following is true of how "The Mystery Ingredient" relates to "The Emperor's Test"?

- A. "The Mystery Ingredient" is about a main character who is already rich and successful, while "The Emperor's Test" is about a main character who is poor.
- B. "The Mystery Ingredient" disproves the idea presented in "The Emperor's Test" that honesty is the best policy.
- C. "The Mystery Ingredient" updates "The Emperor's Test" by using more modern language.
- D. "The Mystery Ingredient" is about someone who succeeds in a contest, while "The Emperor's Test" is about someone who fails.

Part B

Identify two sentences, one from "The Emperor's Test" and one from "The Mystery Ingredient," that support your answer to Part A.

3 Which of the following sentences could appear in **both** a plot summary of "The Mystery Ingredient" and a plot summary of "The Emperor's Test"?

- A. The emperor is choosing a successor.
- B. The chef has a trick up his sleeve.
- C. The story features a baking competition.
- D. In the end, the honest character wins.

4 Below, write two story details, one from "The Emperor's Test" and one from "The Mystery Ingredient" to support the idea that both Ling and Leona are determined.

5 Both the "The Emperor's Test" and "The Mystery Ingredient" reveal the events in the order in which they happened. What effect does this have on the reader? How would the stories have been different if Ling and Leona won the contests at the beginning of the stories and then recalled the events of the contests?

Write your answer on the lines below.
