

**ARTIE PARKER**  
**by Dianne Homan**

The grade three teacher called roll first thing every morning so we could hear what alphabetical order sounded like. I said my “Here,” then waited. When she got to “Artie Parker,” I got a shiver. I held my head still and shifted just my eyes to the right so he wouldn’t know I was looking at him. He was so cute. His name, Artie Parker, was so cute.

And I was so shy. There was no way I could talk to Artie Parker. But I got the shiver and shifted my eyes every day.

By grade four, I thought maybe he’d be impressed by my being a good student. So I read book after book, and the titles on little squares of construction paper lined up after my name on the bulletin board, stretching way farther than anyone else’s. In grade five, I wiped out the competition in spelling bees. In grade six, I whipped through the individualized reading activity cards, flouncing my way to the front of the room to exchange them.

Then in grade seven, the class seating arrangement chart finally delivered. Artie Parker’s desk was right beside mine. I even said a few words to him the time he dropped his pencil and I retrieved it for him. My cheeks were red-hot.

By grade eight, it was clear that he was in the popular kids’ crowd, and I was not. Since we now exchanged rooms between classes and had electives, I didn’t see as much of his cute face.

But we had English together, and our teacher introduced a unit on expository speaking. We would have to stand up in front of the class and explain or demonstrate something. We had a weekend to prepare.

The idea of talking in front of the whole class didn’t intimidate me half as much as the idea of saying three words to Artie Parker. So I discussed and demonstrated isometric exercises. I kind of hammed it up. When I stood in a doorway and pressed against both sides, I made my muscles shake. And then

when I showed how to rub one's knuckles under the chin to keep the neckline firm, I stuck out my tongue like I was choking myself. Everybody laughed – including Artie Parker.

The next day, it was his turn to speak. I was nervous because I hardly knew what his voice sounded like, didn't know how smart he was, didn't know if he was going to bore me like most of the kids had.

He delivered his opening statement – something about building a better mousetrap. And then from his brown paper bag, he pulled out the game “Mousetrap,” with all its levers and wheels and crazy colourful pieces. Keeping a straight face, he proceeded to show us (who had probably all played the game) how to put it together. The class was in stitches.

That's when I fell out of love with Artie Parker. It was such a relief, finally, to just like him.