



Amy, almost 13

What have you been doing this week?

We haven't been doing a lot at school because it is right before the break,* so we don't do a lot. They try to squish* in a lot of tests during the week before we get out so we can start a new unit* after the break. So I had a math test and a science test. In orchestra we've been learning new notes,* how to read them and how to do them on the instrument.

What instrument do you play?

I play the viola.*

Is there anything else happening?

I have a guitar lesson this afternoon. And Christmas is coming very soon. On Christmas most of my friends wake up in the morning and open presents, but my family doesn't traditionally celebrate Christmas. We don't have any Vietnamese holidays in this part of the year so we just celebrate Christmas for the fun of it. We don't open presents in the morning. We prepare food all day and then my family and friends come over, and we open presents at night and eat. We usually make Vietnamese food, and sometimes chicken wings* too.

Have you been buying and making presents?

I usually make cards or homemade gifts, but this year I haven't had time. I had this test in language arts a couple weeks ago and I failed* it. I got really upset, and I asked the teacher if I could have a re-take.* At first she said no, and I started

crying because I knew my mom would get really upset, so the teacher let me take a re-take, so I have been studying. I got 100* on my re-take.

What do you study in language arts?

We learn parts of speech, grammar, and do presentations in class. Recently we made a parody* of *The Night Before Christmas** and we presented it today.

Anything else?

My birthday is tomorrow, so I'm having friends over. We're going to have a sleepover.* We'll go ice skating and then we'll go rent movies and we'll go back home and watch them.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Umm, let me think. You should work hard for your future because it will pay off.

A Few Words

Break: A vacation is sometimes called a break.

Squish: This is an informal word for putting something big in a small space.

Unit: A section of schoolwork on one topic. Each unit usually ends with a test.

Note: Each sound in music is a note. Musicians must learn to read a special way of writing notes on paper.

Viola: A musical instrument like a large violin.

Chicken wings: Fried chicken wings, usually with a spicy sauce. This is a very popular snack in the U.S.

Fail: If you fail a test, you get a really low mark on it.

Re-take: If you re-do something, you do it a second time. If you take a test a second time, it is a re-take. Amy asked if she could study more and take the test a second time.

100: A perfect mark on a test.

Parody: If you copy a famous piece of writing in a funny way, so that people laugh, it is called a parody.

The Night Before Christmas: A famous poem for children.

Sleepover: A party for young children or young teens. Some girls will stay all night at Amy's house, and her mother will make sure that they behave well and are safe.

Discussion Questions

1. Amy will celebrate her birthday with friends, and her family will celebrate Christmas, even though it is not a special holiday for them. When does your family have special celebrations? Are your celebrations a little different from the celebrations of your neighbors?
2. Amy was very upset when she did poorly on a test. What kinds of things upset you? How do you become calm again?