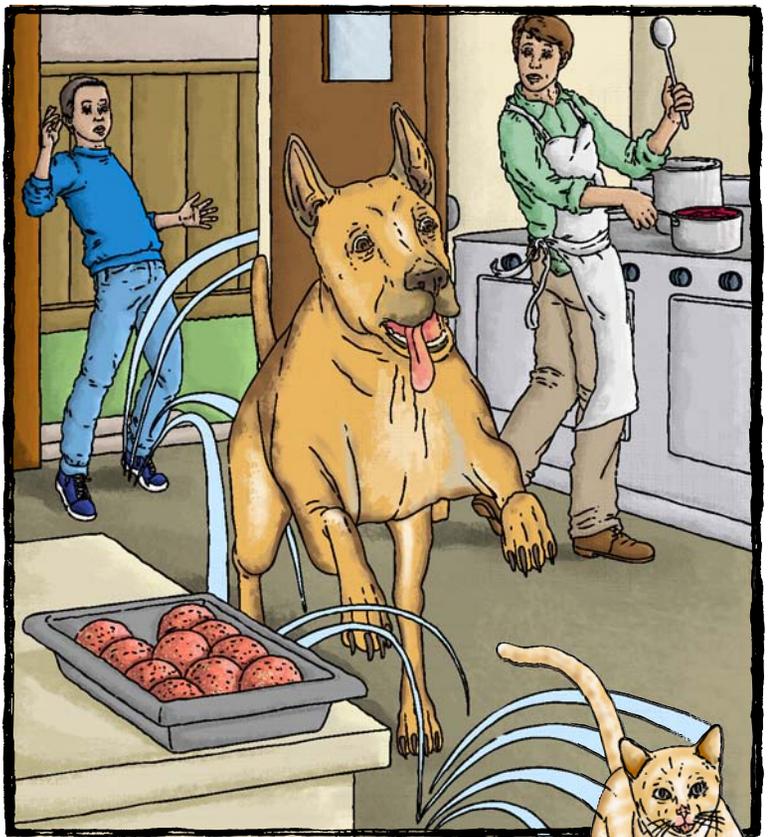


# Magnificent Meatball Maker

A Reading A-Z Level U Benchmark Book  
Word Count: 1,093



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Illustrated by Tom Barrett

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## Correlation

### LEVEL U

Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



Timmy checked his list to see what he still needed to **prep**. He had already peeled and minced 15 heads of garlic, cleaned and chopped 10 bunches of basil, and peeled 20 potatoes. All that was left to do was dice the roasted red peppers and make the rosemary marinade. Since Timmy's parents had divorced, he'd hung out at his Uncle Mario's Italian restaurant after school while his dad was still at work. But now Timmy prepped on Saturday afternoons like a real member of the kitchen staff.

*Mario's Kitchen* was a casual neighborhood restaurant just eight houses away from Timmy's dad's house. But people came from far and wide to feast on Chef Mario's food—like ants swarming a picnic. The celebrity status that chefs such as his uncle enjoyed is something Timmy **coveted**. He wanted to cause his own neighborhood sensation and take the **culinary** world by storm.

Timmy washed his hands and dried them on his apron before heading to the empty dining room for a soda break. He passed photos on the wall of famous people posing with his uncle. Actors, athletes, politicians, singers—even a president—ate at *Mario's Kitchen*. On the opposite wall hung glowing articles and raving reviews from some of the city's toughest **critics**. Timmy never tired of hanging out here, and who better to learn to cook from than his Uncle Mario—a self-trained and celebrated chef.

"Timmy, help me with these bags, eh?" huffed Uncle Mario, back from the Farmers Market, where he purchased the freshest **ingredients** daily, six blocks away. "Guess who just called me to make dinner **reservations** tonight? Wait, I'll give you some hints. He's as tall as a door, as fast as a cheetah, and . . . he's pitching Monday night for the Sluggers."

"Not Johnny McLane!" shrieked 10-year-old Timmy, following his uncle back to the kitchen.

"The one and only—and he requested *Mario's Magnificent Meatballs and Spaghetti*, so I've got to get cooking before my 4 o'clock flight to meet **investors** in Chicago."



Uncle Mario cruised to the walk-in and began snatching ingredients for his famous meatballs—beef, pork, veal, aged parmigiana cheese . . .

“So, Chef Timmy,” Uncle Mario asked while grinding the meat, “what delectable dishes did you cook at home this week?”

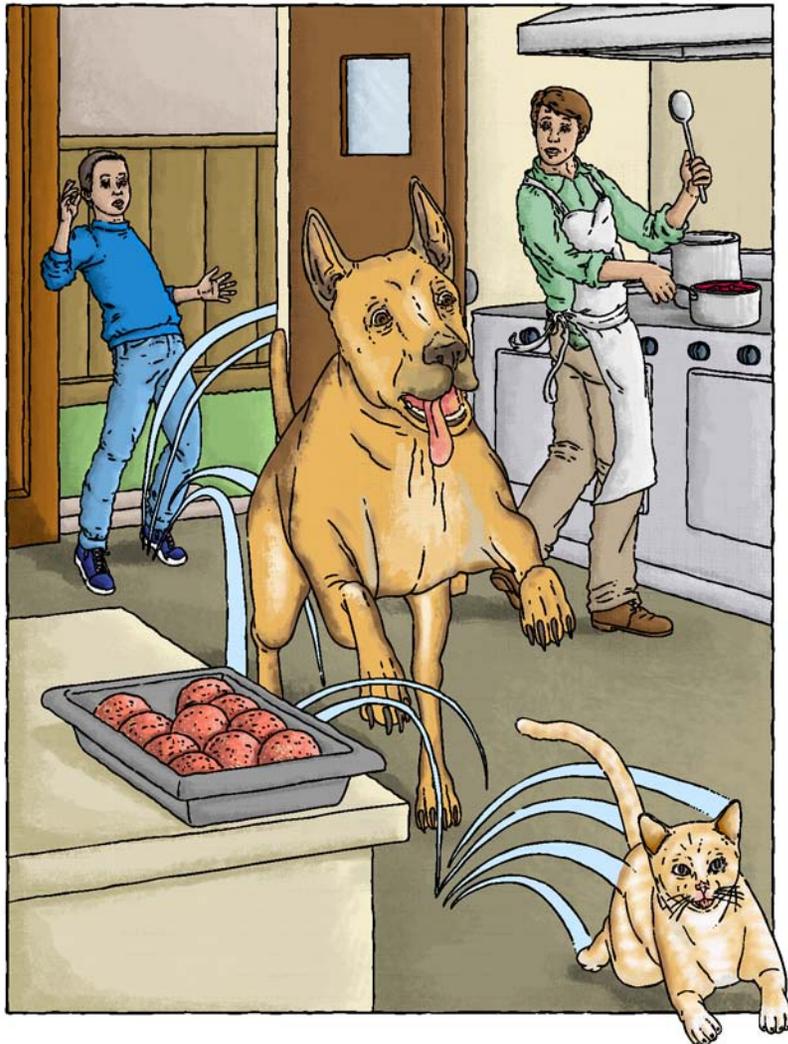
Timmy described Monday’s fettuccine alla carbonara and Wednesday’s chicken cutlets before asking why *Mario’s Magnificent Meatballs and Spaghetti*—his uncle’s **signature** dish—was taken off the menu. These days, his uncle made the dish only by request.

“Those meatballs got more press than Tiger Woods!” chuckled his uncle. “Remember the lines around the block and customers squabbling for a table! My calm, charming, 65-seat restaurant became disorderly . . . frenzied . . . chaotic . . . riotous . . . downright zoolike! People acted like caged animals fighting over the best bits of meat. But I’m whipping up a plan to add those meatballs back to the menu.”

Timmy returned to his prep list, briefly wondering what his signature dish would be when he opened his own **bistro**. He watched as Uncle Mario mixed the ground meat in a gigantic, aluminum bowl, then his uncle moved to a secluded corner counter where he added the other ingredients. Only Uncle Mario made the meatballs and only he knew the secret spices that made this dish so irresistible—and so famous. He protected the recipe like a diamond. That’s why Timmy was stunned when his uncle handed him the secret recipe after baking this latest batch.

“Kiddo, I was going to entrust you with this recipe when you got older,” whispered Uncle Mario, “but since you’re already a top-notch chef, I want you to have it now. Let’s keep it our secret—from one chef to another.” Then off he went on his trip to Chicago, leaving Timmy to fill his head with the **implications**.

Between owning the secret meatball recipe and his baseball hero coming to the restaurant, Timmy felt like a balloon about to burst! He finished his prep work at 5:40 and was heading out the door when he was nearly knocked over by a screeching cat, chased by an enormous, barking dog.



The cat darted under the dishwasher, but the dog lost interest in its foe after smelling the mouth-watering meatballs on the counter. The horse-like canine stood on its hind legs and devoured the meatballs like a famished shark.

“Not Johnny McLane’s dinner!” groaned the *sous chef*, who was in charge of the kitchen when Executive Chef Mario was away.

“What are we going to do?” said a weary cook.

While the cooks fretted, Timmy slipped into the chilly walk-in and retrieved the secret recipe from his jeans pocket. With urgency, he filled a plastic bin with the necessary ingredients, grabbed the grinder, and called over his shoulder, “I’ll be back in an hour with Mario’s meatballs.” The looks of shock didn’t register, and Timmy barely heard the riot of questions he left in his wake.

“Move over, Dad, I’ve got a meatball emergency here!” Timmy set out his ingredients as his dad pulled his smoked pea soup off the stove at home.

“Sounds serious,” said his dad with a raised eyebrow. “Holler if you need me.”



“So that’s how he gets that flavor.” Timmy smiled as he mixed, then rolled the ingredients into spheres nearly as big as baseballs for baking. Back at *Mario’s Kitchen* under the watchful eyes of the sous chef, Timmy plopped the mystery-recipe meatballs into a huge pot of simmering tomato sauce for 20 minutes.

The cooks anxiously watched through the tiny, circular kitchen window as Johnny McLane and his wife ate their meatballs and spaghetti. The staff exchanged high-fives with Timmy when the couple “oohed” and “ahhed” over their first bites.

“Yesssss!” Timmy couldn’t believe he just cooked for Johnny McLane—and his hero *liked* it!

Timmy forgot to ask for an autograph that night, but the quote in Sunday morning’s paper was even better:

## Seen Around Town



Last night, Johnny and Debbie McLane dined at *Mario’s Kitchen*. What did they eat? Their favorite dish, “*Mario’s Magnificent Meatballs and Spaghetti*.” Here’s what Johnny had to say about his meal: “I don’t know what’s in those meatballs, but they taste as great as striking out a hitter feels!”

The ringing telephone brought Timmy back down to earth.

“Great news, kiddo. *Mario’s Kitchen* is expanding from 65 seats to 115 seats, and *Mario’s Magnificent Meatballs and Spaghetti* is going back on the menu! I’ll show you the blueprints tomorrow, buddy.”

A huge smile crept on Timmy’s face, his future bright in front of him, as he wondered aloud, “Maybe I’ll be promoted to Magnificent Meatball Maker!”

## Baked Meatball Recipe

Uncle Mario's recipe is still a secret, but here's a baked meatball recipe you could try at home with the help of an adult.

**Prep time:** 20 minutes

**Cook time:** 20–25 minutes

### Ingredients:

½ pound ground beef	¼ cup frozen spinach, thawed and drained
½ pound ground pork	
½ pound ground lamb	1-½ teaspoons dried basil
1 large egg	1-½ teaspoons dried parsley
½ cup milk	1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ cup bread crumbs	1 teaspoon salt
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese	½ teaspoon pepper
¼ cup diced onions	

- 1 Ask an adult to preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 2 In a large mixing bowl, combine all the ingredients. Mix well using your hands.
- 3 Shape the meat mixture into about 20 round balls that are about 1 to 2 inches in diameter.
- 4 Place the meatballs onto a sheet pan lined with aluminum foil.
- 5 Ask an adult to place the pan in the oven. Bake the meatballs for about 20–25 minutes or until they are no longer pink in the center.

Enjoy with your favorite tomato sauce and pasta or in a meatball sandwich!

## Glossary

<b>bistro</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a small, informal restaurant (p. 6)
<b>coveted</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	wished for or wanted something very much (p. 3)
<b>critics</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who find fault or carefully judge for review (p. 4)
<b>culinary</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	relating to food or cooking (p. 3)
<b>implications</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	things that are understood without being expressed directly as a result of something else (p.6)
<b>ingredients</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	food items that go into a dish or recipe (p. 4)
<b>investors</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people, companies, or organizations that invest in something that may increase in value over time (p. 4)
<b>prep</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	slang for prepare, to make something ready (p. 3)
<b>reservations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	bookings in advance for a room or seat (p. 4)
<b>signature</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	relating to a distinct characteristic or thing that identifies somebody (p. 5)