

# The Acorn People

Ron Jones

Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

### Day 1

Even though he knows the camp is for disabled children, Ron Jones anticipates sunny days of hiking, swimming, and boating as a counselor at Camp Wiggin. But when the children arrive and he realizes how severely disabled they are, it seems too much to bear. In contrast, Ron's fellow counselor Dominic Cavelli is well prepared for the task, as he trains for a career as a special education teacher.

### Day 2

The next morning, Ron is appalled that three kids have wet their beds. He starts seeing them as individuals. First is Benny B, a polio victim. Nonetheless, Benny is a speed demon in his wheelchair. Then comes Spider, who lacks arms and legs and talks nonstop. Thomas Stewart has muscular sclerosis and weighs only 35 pounds even though he is fifteen or sixteen years old. Martin is blind, and very personable and outgoing. Aaron Gerwalski is nicknamed "Arid" because of his dreadful smell, a result of his lack of a bladder. On the first day, Ron makes an acorn necklace. The kids all make acorn necklaces, too. Spider dubs the campers and counselors the "Acorn People." Swimming proves to be a huge success because it gives all the kids some measure of mobility.

### Day 3

The next day, Ron is astonished that no one has wet the bed. In addition, they are all wearing their acorn necklaces. Mr. Bradshaw, the camp owner, has a ludicrous plan for activities, not comprehending that these campers are not his usual Boy Scouts. The kids plan their own day, with the counselors' help. They start with a boy-girls swim, which is a huge success. Ron's boys give acorn necklaces

to the girls they like. Soon, everyone in camp is wearing an acorn necklace.

### Day 6

Ron and his kids decide to climb Lookout Mountain, an arduous six-mile round trip. Astonishingly, the severely-handicapped kids manage it, wheelchairs and all. The hikers expect a huge welcome but the other campers are subdued because Mr. Bradshaw has decided to clamp down on "unruly behavior" – Dominic's cooking club, archery, Lenny's songs, and most especially the antics of the camp nurse, Mrs. Nelson. She shows the girls how to wear makeup, applied with a very heavy hand.

### Day 7

In an act of defiance, the kids label everything. As a treat, Mr. Bradshaw shows a water safety movie. The counselors and campers are appalled at his insensitivity, since all the kids in the movie are able-bodied. Mrs. Nelson gets drunk and removes all the labels, with Ron's help.

### Day 8

Removing the labels is celebrated as an act of rebellion and Mrs. Nelson becomes the camp hero.

### Day 10

The kids hold a dance. Mrs. Nelson is elected queen; Arid is the king. As the camp draws to a close, the kids regress and become depressed. The parents are coming on Saturday to pick up their kids and Mr. Bradshaw plans to show another water safety/water ballet movie.

### Three Days to Go

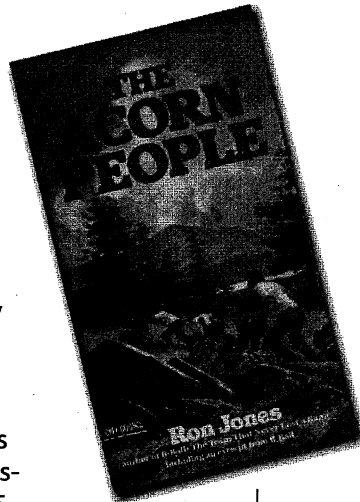
Mrs. Nelson suggests the camper stage their own water extravaganza for their families. The idea is an instant hit.

### Two Days to Go

Mrs. Nelson plans the event and directs them. They build a set as she writes the script.

### One Day Left

Mrs. Nelson divides the participants into pirates and natives.



## 0 Days Left

The girls make leis. The water extravaganza is a smash hit. Mrs. Nelson throws the silverware into the pool as treasure. The kids retrieve it. Spider races Ron and Spider wins, despite the fact that he lacks limbs. Ron learns that, inside, the handicapped kids are the same as any average kid, and with encouragement, determination, and friendship, nothing is impossible.

## Epilog

Years pass. All the principal kids in the story have died. After Benny's funeral, his mother gives Ron a crumpled acorn necklace. She said that he gave them to everyone he met.

## Timeline of Milestones in Equal Opportunity & Education

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| <p><b>1635</b> The first Latin Grammar School (the Roxbury Latin School) is established.<br/>The first "free school" in Virginia opens.</p> <p><b>1636</b> Harvard College, the first higher education institution in the New World, established in Cambridge, MA</p> <p><b>1642</b> The Massachusetts Bay School Law is passed, requiring parents to make sure their children know the principles of religion and the laws of the commonwealth.</p> <p><b>1647</b> The Massachusetts Law of 1647 is passed, requiring that every town of at least 50 families hire a schoolmaster to teach the children to read and write, and that all towns of at least 100 families should have a Latin grammar school master who will prepare students to attend Harvard College.</p> <p><b>1690</b> The first <i>New England Primer</i> is printed in Boston. It becomes the most widely-used schoolbook in New England.</p> <p><b>1751</b> Franklin helps to establish the first "English Academy" in Philadelphia. The academy later becomes the University of Pennsylvania.</p> <p><b>1779</b> Jefferson proposes a two-track educational system, with different tracks for "the laboring and the learned."</p> <p><b>1785</b> Noah Webster writes <i>A Grammatical Institute of the English Language</i>: a spelling book, a</p> | <p>grammar book, and a reader. They become very widely used throughout the United States.</p> <p><b>1817</b> The Connecticut Asylum at Hartford for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons opens. It is the first permanent school for the deaf in the U.S..</p> <p><b>1821</b> First public high school, Boston English High School opens.</p> <p><b>1827</b> Massachusetts passes a law requiring towns of more than 500 families to have a public high school open to all students.</p> <p><b>1829</b> The New England Asylum for the Blind, now the Perkins School for the Blind, opens in MA, becoming the first school in the U.S. for children with visual disabilities.</p> <p><b>1836</b> The first of William Holmes McGuffey's readers is published.</p> <p><b>1837</b> Mount Holyoke Female Seminary opens. It is the first college for women in the U.S.</p> <p><b>1839</b> The first state funded school specifically for teacher education (then known as "normal" schools) opens in Lexington, Massachusetts.</p> <p><b>1848</b> Massachusetts School for Idiotic and Feebleminded Youth, the first school of its kind in the U.S., opens.</p> <p><b>1851</b> The New York State Asylum for Idiots opens.</p> <p><b>1852</b> Massachusetts enacts the first mandatory school attendance law.</p> <p><b>1856</b> The first kindergarten in the U.S. is started in Watertown, Wisconsin.</p> <p><b>1857</b> The National Teachers Association (now the National Education Association) is founded.</p> <p><b>1862</b> The First Morrill Act donates public lands to states, the sale of which will be used for the "endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life."</p> |
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- 1864** Gallaudet University, the first college specifically for deaf students, opens.
- 1875** The Civil Rights Act is passed, banning segregation in all public accommodations. The Supreme Court rules it unconstitutional in 1883, deciding that the Congress did not have the authority to regulate the conduct of individuals.
- 1881** Booker T. Washington becomes the first principal of the newly-opened normal school in Tuskegee, Alabama, now Tuskegee University.
- 1890** The Second Morrill Act is enacted, providing for the "more complete endowment and support of the colleges" through the sale of public lands." Part of this funding leads to the creation of 16 black colleges.
- 1916** The Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Scale becomes a widely-used individual intelligence test, and along with it, the concept of the intelligence quotient (IQ) is created.
- 1916** The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is founded.
- 1917** Army Alpha and Beta tests lay the groundwork for future standardized tests.
- 1919** All states have laws providing funds for transporting children to school.
- 1926** The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is first administered.
- 1944** The G.I. Bill signed. Nearly 8 million World War II veterans take advantage of the GI Bill during the seven years benefits are offered. More than two million attend colleges or universities.
- 1952** Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 modifies the G.I. Bill for veterans of the Korean War.
- 1954** Brown v. Board. of Education of Topeka, ruling that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."
- 1957** Federal troops enforce integration in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- 1963** Samuel A. Kirk uses the term "learning disability" at a Chicago conference on children with perceptual disorders. The term sticks, and in 1964, the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, now the Learning Disabilities Association of America, is formed. Today, more than one-half of all students in the U.S. who receive special education have been diagnosed as having learning disabilities.
- 1964** The Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion or national origin.
- 1965** The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed, providing federal funds to help low-income students. This results in educational programs such as Title I, Head Start, and bilingual education.
- 1966** Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 provides educational benefits for Vietnam veterans.
- 1971** Federal court rules that students with mental retardation are entitled to a free public education.
- 1972** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 becomes law, prohibiting discrimination based on sex in all aspects of education. Mills v. the Board of Education of Washington, D.C. extends the PARC v. Pennsylvania ruling to other students with disabilities and requires the provision of "adequate alternative educational services suited to the child's needs, which may include special education ..."
- 1975** The Education of All Handicapped Children Act passed, requiring a free, appropriate public education, suited to the student's individual needs, be offered in the least restrictive setting.
- 1990** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is passed, mandating transition services and adds autism and traumatic brain injury to the eligibility list.
- 2001** No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) becomes law, holding schools accountable for student achievement levels. The act provides penalties for schools that do not make adequate

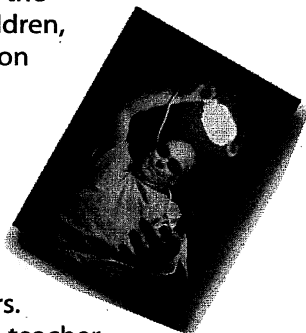
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yearly progress toward meeting the goals of NCLB.

**2004** The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act reauthorizes and modifies IDEA

### Author Sketch

Ron Jones, a native of San Francisco, lives in the Haight Ashbury section of the city with his wife, their children, and their grandchildren. Ron graduated from Stanford University in 1966 with a BA in Education and International Relations plus a minor in sports.



Jones has enjoyed a number of different careers. He began as a high school teacher in Palo Alto, CA, which ended with his termination in 1969. Since 1978, Jones has been Director of Physical Education at the Janet Pomeroy Center (formerly the Recreational Center for the Handicapped) in San Francisco where he coaches the San Francisco Special Olympic Basketball Team. Jones is also the founder of Zephyros Education Exchange, a network of teachers who share ideas and learning materials.

In addition, Jones is a performance artist. His storytelling in San Francisco's Solo Mio Festival and in coffee houses and theaters in the United States has attracted positive attention. Studs Terkel wrote that Ron Jones "...tells perhaps the most important story of our time." Jones has assembled his stories into "Storytelling Videos" that blend spoken word, jazz, images from home movies, still photos, and original art.

The child of a Jewish mother and a gentile father, Jones was not raised in the Jewish faith. His parents celebrated Christmas, "but we went to synagogue whenever the relatives came to town or for weddings and Bar Mitzvahs," he said. He credits his Jewish grandmother with influencing his interest in storytelling. "What I remember most about Jewish life is the dinner table and listening to her stories."

### Critic's Corner

The *Seattle Times* wrote that *The Acorn People* is "a fantastic and beautiful story." The *Houston Chronicle* called it "Uncomfortably moving, yet told in surprisingly unsentimental terms.... Succinct and tender, it will haunt the reader long after the brief passages have been read." The *Lincoln Journal* in Nebraska said: "It will give your innards a bear hug.... You will read this book with a lump in your throat."

Most readers find the story equally affecting. An amazon.com reader, for instance, posted this comment: "*The Acorn People* by Ron Jones is a story teaching about respecting other people no matter what they look like on the outside.... I would recommend this book to everyone who can read."

### Other Books by Ron Jones

*The Wave*  
*Jitterbug*  
*Mint Jammin'*  
*B-Ball*

### Bibliography

Ron Jones Official Web Page  
<http://www.ronjoneswriter.com/>

### General Objectives

1. To analyze the novel's title
2. To understand why Ron Jones has taken a job at the camp
3. To understand why Dominic Cavelli is working at the camp
4. To analyze different views of the handicapped
5. To describe the novel's plot
6. To recognize the novel's theme
7. To learn about handicapped children
8. To understand how Ron adapts to working with this special population
9. To explore the ways that kindness can be shown
10. To analyze the novel's tone

## Specific Objectives

1. To compare and contrast conditions for the handicapped twenty-five years ago to conditions today
2. To analyze why the acorn necklaces are so significant to the campers
3. To appreciate how each handicapped child struggles to survive
4. To analyze what the climb up Lookout Mountain symbolizes for the children
5. To understand why the camp stages the Camp Wiggin Water Extravaganza
6. To explore why Mrs. Nelson and Ron take down all the labels
7. To analyze Ron's feelings for the children
8. To decide why Mary kisses Ron at the end of the book
9. To share the author's joy in the children's accomplishments
10. To feel sorrow at the children's premature death

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Ron Jones' style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**symbol** is a person, place, or object that represents an abstract idea. For example, a dove may symbolize peace or a rose may symbolize love. In *The Acorn People*, for instance, the acorn necklaces stand for belonging. They give the children a sense that they are among their peers and for once, are not stared at and pitied for being different.

**tone** the writer's attitude toward his or her subject matter. For example, the tone can be angry, bitter, sad, or frightening. The tone of *The Acorn People* is sentimental. Jones uses this tone to create an elegiac feeling for the camp and its participants.

**point of view** the position from which a story is told. In the first-person point of view, the narrator is one of the characters in the story. The narrator explains the events through his or her own eyes, using the pronouns I and me. In the third-person point of view, the narrator is not a character in the story. Instead, the narrator looks through the eyes

of all the characters and uses the pronouns he, she, and they. As a result, the narrator is "all-knowing."

**third-person limited point of view**, the narrator tells the story through the eyes of only one character, using the pronouns he, she, and they. *The Acorn People* is told from the first-person point of view, though Ron Jones' eyes. This gives the novel an immediacy and personal note that it would not have had if told from another point of view.

## The Importance of Setting

The setting is crucial to the effectiveness of *The Acorn People*. The story is set in Camp Wiggin, deep in the woods. It is a Boy Scout camp, so it is not equipped with any modifications to make it suitable to handicapped children. In addition, the novel is set in 1976, before much of the legislation mandating modifications for the handicapped had been passed and enforced.

Camp Wiggin has all the usual camp trappings, including trees, paths, a pool, mountain, art room, and so on. However, it also has a martinet as an owner, Mr. Bradshaw. He neither understands nor cares that his latest crop of campers cannot easily use the facilities. As a result, Ron and his fellow counselors must adapt the setting to the needs of their campers. For example, they reject the rigid schedule that Mr. Bradshaw sets up; instead, they incorporate much more swimming because the handicapped children feel free in the water and can mobilize freely there. They even mock Bradshaw's water safety movie by staging their own Wiggin Water Extravaganza.

Mr. Bradshaw mirrors Ron's initial discomfort with the extent of the children's handicaps. Ron grows and changes during the course of the novel; Mr. Bradshaw does not.

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## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Nonfiction

Marcia Jean Carter, *Therapeutic Recreation: A Practical Approach*

### Novels

Sue Brearley, *Adventure Holiday*

James and Chris Collier, *My Brother Sam Is Dead*

Marguerite De Angeli, *The Door in the Wall*

Susan Fletcher, *Shadow Spinner*

S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*

Ben Mikaelson, *Petey*

Diane Muldrow, *The New Counselor*

Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet*

Robert Newton Peck, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*

Rodman Philbrick, *Freak The Mighty*

Gene S. Porter, *Freckles*

Terry Trueman, *Stuck in Neutral*

### Audio/Media

*The Acorn People* (NBC TV Special)

*The Wave* (ABC TV Special)

*B-Ball* (NBC Movie of The Week)

### DVDs and Videos

*A Beautiful Mind*

*Jack the Bear*

*Forrest Gump*

*Freak the Mighty*

*Good Will Hunting*

*Max the Mighty*

*Simon Birch*

### Internet

Ron Jones Official Web Page

<http://www.ronjoneswriter.com>

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Ron Jones' *The Acorn People* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- acorns
- adjustments
- camping
- death
- dreams of normalcy
- expectations
- handicaps
- hiking
- pain
- swimming

### Motifs

- making and wearing acorn necklaces
- coping with a severe physical disability
- camping without many conveniences
- dealing with the limitations of a brief life span
- learning new skills
- making friends
- defying authority
- climbing a mountain
- enjoying teenage rites of passage, including a co-ed dance
- performing a water extravaganza

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. The camp nurse had given us a one-day orientation about handicapped children, but to see this mass of injury stunned the brain. (p. 2)  
*(In the same way that Kafka's Metamorphosis is more about the change that Gregor's family undergoes than about Gregor's transformation, so The Acorn People focuses more on the change in Ron's attitude than the changes the children experience. At first, Ron is horrified and even repulsed by the children and wants to go home. By the end of the book, however, he has forged life-long bonds with many of them.)*

2. The first of our kids was Benny B. Benny was black, peanut in size. Polio had taken his legs, but not his gall or heart. (p. 9)  
*(By describing Benny, readers see how Ron has already begun to see each child as an individual, not as a handicap. This allows readers not only to trace Ron's maturation, but also to appreciate each child's uniqueness and courage.)*
3. "I feel a little weird being here, so I've made myself a necklace of nuts." (p. 15)  
*(Ron makes the first acorn necklace. His honesty disarms the kids and soon, they all want acorn necklaces. From this accidental start comes the bonding that makes the camp experience so memorable.)*
4. "We're the Acorn People. Can't you see? (p. 16)  
*(They kids call themselves the "Acorn People" because of the acorn necklaces they wear. Symbolically, from a tiny acorn comes a mighty oak. From these small seeds grows self-realization, happiness, and love. This experience changes the campers' lives and Ron's as well.)*
5. The entire camp—kids, counselors, cook, and even Mrs. Nelson, the old nurse—became Acorn Society members. (p. 28)  
*(The entire camp has become bonded into one entity. This allows them to rebel against Mr. Bradshaw's insensitive rules and assert their special and valued qualities.)*
6. He gently gave the mountain one of his necklaces. Not the act of a conqueror, but a friend. We had done it. (p. 40)  
*(Climbing Lookout Mountain proves to the children that they can conquer anything— even mountains. Readers know that this feeling is temporary and illusory—as shown by the fact that all the children die early—but it sends a powerful message nonetheless.)*
7. The most unruly act of camp was perpetuated by the camp nurse, Mrs. Nelson. (p. 45)  
*(The children's rebellion is mild, mainly cooking, using makeup, and singing. However, Ron endorses breaking the rules as the best way to cope with the constraints that their medical conditions and society has placed on the children.)*
8. Mr. Bradshaw was delighted by this flurry of activity. (p. 49)  
*(Because of his insensitivity, Mr. Bradshaw becomes the enemy. He helps give the book a focus and shape, as the children and counselors fight his rules.)*
9. Like the surprise and wonder of finding the sky, revolution can't be planned. (p. 53)  
*(There are two main rebellions. The first is the removal of the labels. The second is the Wiggin Water Extravaganza, the rebellion against the water safety movies that Mr. Bradshaw shows. Both are spontaneous. It is plain from the novel that Jones admires rebellion.)*
10. All the principal children in this story are now dead. (Epilog)  
*(The narrative ends on a high note, with the highly-successful Wiggin Water Extravaganza. Jones brings the story back to reality in the Epilog by reminding readers that all the children in the novel were severely handicapped. This brings the story back to the beginning, when Ron first saw the children and was shocked by their disabilities.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What is Ron's initial reaction to the handicapped campers?  
*(He is appalled by them. He feels like a slave and resents it. He wants to go home.)*
2. How is Dominic the same as Ron? How is he different?  
*(Like Ron, Dominic is working as a counselor. Unlike Ron, Dominic plans a career working with handicapped kids and has no problems working with them. He accepts them from the very beginning and is comfortable with them.)*

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3. What is Benny's handicap?  
*(He has polio, which has crippled him.)*
4. Why do the children like to swim so much?  
*(The water allows them much greater mobility than the land does. As a result, the water allows them to interact with members of the opposite sex more freely.)*
5. What is the ultimate fate of all the children described in the book?  
*(They all die early.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What do the acorn necklaces symbolize in the novel?  
*(They stand for being part of a group, of belonging. They also represent love and acceptance.)*
7. Why do the children climb the mountain, when they know that the task is close to impossible for them?  
*(They want to prove that they can accomplish brutally difficult tasks that non-handicapped children can accomplish.)*
8. What does the camp experience mean to the children? To Ron?  
*(It allows the children a respite from the stares and difficulties of daily life. They are members of a close-knit community while at camp. The camp helps Ron mature.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Who is the hero of this book?  
*(Student can make a case for the campers, who show extraordinary determination and courage. They can also argue that Mrs. Nelson is heroic for her effective rebellion and quiet leadership.)*
10. Did you like Ron? Why or why not?  
*(Students who like him are likely to cite his adaptation, hard work, and concern for the children. Students who do not admire him can cite his self-concern and self-aggrandizement.)*

### Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Imagine that you are Ron. Decide whether or not you would have stayed at the camp after the first day.

12. List three things you would change at Camp Wiggin to make the experience easier and more fun for the children and the counselors.

## Across the Curriculum

### Art/Music

1. Draw a diagram of Camp Wiggin. Show each part of the camp, including the cabins, the pool, and the arts and crafts center.
2. Write one of the songs that Lenny X would sing. Share the lyrics and tune with your classmates.
3. Learn "Kum By Ya." Sing it with some friends.
4. Draw a new cover for the book.
5. Make an acorn necklace. Give it to a friend.

### Language Arts

1. Imagine that you are Dominic. Rewrite any one of the chapters from his point of view.
2. Rob Jones had been an athlete and a physical education major in college. Explain the irony of his working in a camp for physically handicapped children.
3. Write a critical review of this book for the school newspaper. Would you recommend it to other people your age? Why or why not?
4. Isolate any three symbols from the novel and explain what they represent. Possibilities include the acorn necklace, the mountain, and the Wiggin Water Extravaganza, for instance.
5. Imagine that you are Ron. Write a letter home to your family, explaining how you have changed as a result of your time at Camp Wiggin.

### Social Studies/Geography

1. Make a map showing some camps in your area.



2. Trace the history of the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. Explain some of the values of the organizations, the stages in advancement (such as Eagle Scout in Boy Scouts and Studio 2B in Girl Scouts), and requirements for membership.
3. Learn more about specialized contemporary camps for handicapped and seriously ill children, such as Paul Newman's "Hole in the Wall" camps. Show your findings on a poster.
4. Dominic is from New York City. Make an atlas for New York City, listing at least ten famous places in the city.
5. Ron mentions the movie *The African Queen*. Watch the movie and then explain how the allusion does or does not fit the context (page 31).

### Speech/Debate

1. In a roundtable discussion, explore why it was so important for the handicapped children to have this camp experience.
2. Report on recent laws that have improved conditions for the handicapped. In a speech to the class, summarize the laws and show their visible effects, such as ramps, handicapped-accessible bathrooms, and Braille signs.
3. Debate whether or not untrained people such as Ron should be allowed to work with handicapped children.
4. Role-play a scene in which Ron and Dominic meet several years after the incidents described in this book.
5. With some classmates, decide what qualities make someone a good camp counselor.

### Science/Math

1. Make some of the food that Dominic prepares for the campers.
2. Benny has polio, which has crippled him. Make a chart showing the number of children in America who contracted polio in the 1940s and the number of children who contracted polio today. Find out what has caused the drastic changes.
3. Thomas Stewart has muscular sclerosis. Report on the causes and treatments for this condition.
4. Make a chart showing the number of children in America today who are classified as disabled.
5. Spider does not have any arms or legs. Find out what could have caused his condition. Consider the drug thalidomide, which was prescribed for some pregnant women a few years before the novel was published.

### Alternate Assessment

1. Write a character sketch for any one of the handicapped children.
2. Find out the requirements for obtaining a teaching certificate in special education.
3. Raise money to contribute to a camp for handicapped children.

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## Vocabulary

Complete the following chart with a synonym and antonym for each of the following words from the novel. Write as many words as you can in each column.

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. pallid	_____	_____
2. unruly	_____	_____
3. raucous	_____	_____
4. pensive	_____	_____
5. sullen	_____	_____
6. ruddy	_____	_____
7. frolic	_____	_____
8. gargantuan	_____	_____
9. eerie	_____	_____
10. tranquil	_____	_____

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## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| A. Ron Jones       | F. Martin       |
| B. Dominic Cavelli | G. Arid         |
| C. Benny B         | H. Mr. Bradshaw |
| D. Spider          | I. Mary         |
| E. Thomas Stewart  | J. Mrs. Nelson  |

- \_\_\_ 1. The child with muscular sclerosis
- \_\_\_ 2. The blind female camper
- \_\_\_ 3. The camp nurse
- \_\_\_ 4. The blind male camper
- \_\_\_ 5. The child without arms or legs who likes to talk
- \_\_\_ 6. Ron's fellow counselor
- \_\_\_ 7. The camp owner who insists on following rules
- \_\_\_ 8. The camper who has polio
- \_\_\_ 9. Aaron Gerwalski's nickname
- \_\_\_ 10. The book's narrator

### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Circle the term that best completes each of the following statements.

- 1. Ron Jones anticipates sunny days of hiking, swimming, and boating as a counselor at Camp (**Wiggin, Overlook**).
- 2. On the first day, Ron makes an acorn (**bracelet, necklace**).
- 3. The rest of the time, the camp used by (**Boy Scouts, wealthy people**).
- 4. The camp has an activities center, a cafeteria, and a (**hospital, pool**).
- 5. Ron and his kids decide to climb (**Evergreen, Lookout**) Mountain.
- 6. The hike is a (**six, sixteen**) mile round trip.
- 7. Mrs. Nelson shows the girls how to wear (**makeup, perfume**).
- 8. Mrs. Nelson removes all the (**labels, bees**) with Ron's help.
- 9. The camp nurse suggests that the campers stage their own (**sing-a-long, water show**) for their families. The idea is an instant hit.
- 10. Mrs. Nelson throws the (**keys, silverware**) into the pool as treasure.

**Comprehension Test A (Page 2)**

**Part III: True/False (20 points)**

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Dominic Cavelli is the camp doctor.
- \_\_\_ 2. Ron is upset when he finds out that some kids have wet their beds.
- \_\_\_ 3. All of the campers are five or six years old.
- \_\_\_ 4. The kids are lucky to have two months in camp, the entire summer.
- \_\_\_ 5. The co-ed swim is a huge success.
- \_\_\_ 6. Only a few of the kids wear the acorn necklaces. Everyone else thinks they are heavy and smelly.
- \_\_\_ 7. As a treat, Mr. Bradshaw shows a water safety movie
- \_\_\_ 8. Lenny X, who is mean-looking, sings beautiful songs to the campers.
- \_\_\_ 9. At the dance, Mrs. Nelson is elected queen; Arid is the king.
- \_\_\_ 10. Readers find out that none of the kids dies; they all go on to happy lives.

**Part IV: Essay (40 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Explain how Ron changes during the story.
- 2. Analyze what the acorn necklaces symbolize or stand for.
- 3. Explain why the handicapped children enjoy being at camp so much.
- 4. Compare and contrast Mrs. Nelson and Mr. Bradshaw.

## **Comprehension Test B**

### **Part I: Motivation (20 points)**

Write a reason or motivation to complete each sentence.

1. Ron wants to leave camp on the first day because
2. The next morning, Ron is very upset because
3. Thomas Stewart is very depressed and weak because
4. Aaron Gerwalski got his nickname because
5. The kids call themselves the "Acorn People" because
6. Swimming proves to be a huge success because
7. Ron and his kids decide to climb Lookout Mountain because
8. The kids and counselors are upset at the water safety movie because
9. Mrs. Nelson suggests that the campers stage their own water extravaganza because
10. Ron comes to respect the handicapped children because

### **Part II: Identification (20 points)**

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. the acorn necklaces
2. Mrs. Nelson
3. the Wiggin Water Extravaganza
4. Lookout Mountain
5. the dance

**Comprehension Test B (Page 2)**

**Part III: Matching (20 points)**

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- |                                                           |                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| ___ 1. The camp's owner                                   | A. Benny B         |
| ___ 2. The narrator                                       | B. Martin          |
| ___ 3. The camper who lacks arms and legs                 | C. Arid            |
| ___ 4. The blind boy                                      | D. Dominic Cavelli |
| ___ 5. The camp nurse                                     | E. Mary            |
| ___ 6. The camper with multiple sclerosis                 | F. Ron Jones       |
| ___ 7. The counselor who wants to be a special ed teacher | G. Mr. Bradshaw    |
| ___ 8. The camper with polio                              | H. Spider          |
| ___ 9. The blind girl                                     | I. Mrs. Nelson     |
| ___ 10. The camper born without a bladder                 | J. Thomas Stewart  |

**Part IV: Essay (40 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe the tone of *The Acorn People*. Did you find the novel sentimental or overly emotional? Why or why not?
2. Ron Jones wrote *The Acorn People* more than twenty-five years ago. Explain how life is different for many handicapped children today.
3. Describe two ways that the setting affected the handicapped campers.
4. Analyze how the story would be different if told from Mr. Bradshaw's point of view.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. pallid	pale	florid
2. unruly	wild	subdued
3. raucous	wild	quiet
4. pensive	thoughtful	unthinking, frivolous
5. sullen	moody, sulky	cheerful, jovial
6. ruddy	red, florid, flushed	pale
7. frolic	play, cavort	sit
8. gargantuan	huge	tiny
9. eerie	weird, strange, uncanny	ordinary
10. tranquil	quiet obstreperous	wild

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B  |
| 2. I | 7. H  |
| 3. J | 8. C  |
| 4. F | 9. G  |
| 5. D | 10. A |

#### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. Wiggin     | 6. six         |
| 2. necklace   | 7. makeup      |
| 3. Boy Scouts | 8. labels      |
| 4. pool       | 9. water show  |
| 5. Lookout    | 10. silverware |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. T  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. F |

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Motivation (20 points)

- the children's disabilities seem too much to bear.
- three kids have wet their beds.
- he has muscular sclerosis and weighs only 35

pounds even though he is fifteen or sixteen years old.

- of his dreadful smell, a result of lacking a bladder.
- they all wear acorn necklaces; because it gives them a feeling of belonging.
- it gives all the kids some measure of mobility.
- they want the sense of accomplishment and normalcy it will bring.
- it shows only non-handicapped children.
- it will make them feel good and have fun.
- he learns that the handicapped kids are the same as any average kid, and with encouragement, determination, and friendship, nothing is impossible.

#### Part II: Identification (20 points)

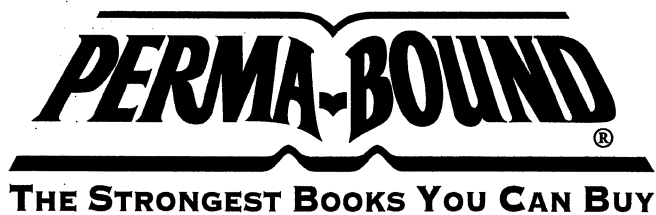
- The acorn necklaces symbolize a sense of belonging. They bond the campers and counselors into a unified group. They are also a symbol of defiance, showing that the handicapped can surmount many difficulties.
- Mrs. Nelson, the camp nurse, becomes a hero when she rips down all the labels. She also organizes the Camp Wiggin Water Extravaganza and teaches the girls to wear makeup.
- The Wiggin Water Extravaganza is the show the campers and counselors stage on the last day. Not only does everyone enjoy it, but it also allows everyone to shine. This is especially true for armless, legless Spider, who wins the swimming race against Ron.
- Ron and Dominic take their campers on a six-mile hike up Lookout Mountain. On the summit, the kids lie back and enjoy the sky, a beautiful sight that bonds them even closer together. The hike demonstrates that handicapped children are often capable of remarkable feats.
- The dance is a rite of passage for all teenagers. It is especially important for handicapped children, who feel the same sexual urges as other children but are often unable to find companionship because of their disabilities.

#### Part III: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. J  |
| 2. F | 7. D  |
| 3. H | 8. A  |
| 4. B | 9. E  |
| 5. I | 10. C |

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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