

All the Pretty Horses

by Cormac McCarthy

Teacher's Guide

Written By Kathy Sammis

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Synopsis

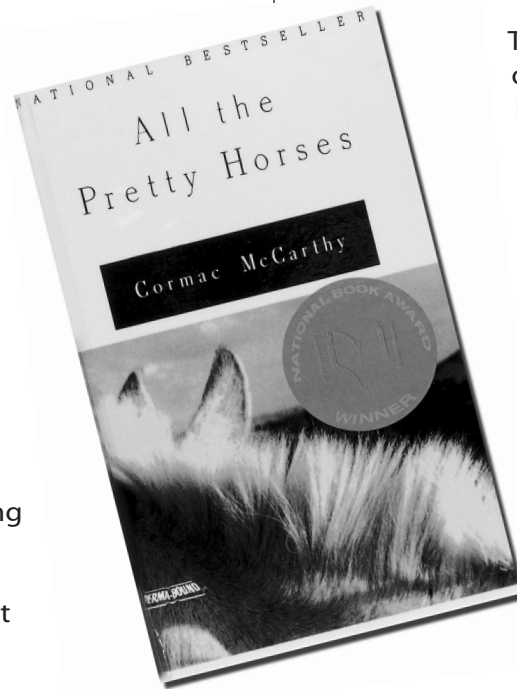
Chapter 1

Sixteen-year-old John Grady Cole has grown up on his grandfather's cattle ranch in San Angelo, West Texas. The only life John Grady has ever envisioned for himself is that of a cowboy, working his family's ranch. But now, in 1949, the grandfather has died and John Grady's mother has inherited the ranch. She is thirty-six years old, is recently divorced from John Grady's father after years of separation, and aspires to be a stage actress. She is going to sell the ranch, which barely meets expenses, and create a new life for herself, despite her son's pleas not to do so. John Grady now sees no future for himself in San Angelo. Early in 1950, he takes leave of his terminally ill father; both father and son are spare speakers, so the leave-taking is awkward.

In March, John Grady and his best friend, seventeen-year-old Lacey Rawlins, set out on horseback for Mexico, determined to live the cowboy life that no longer seems possible in Texas as cattle ranches are converted to oil fields. This first part of their adventure more than meets the boys' expectations, as they sleep in their bedrolls under the stars, cook simple meals around the campfire, roll cigarettes, and exchange bits of laconic cowboy-type wisdom and humor.

As John Grady and Lacey near the Rio Grande, they find a younger boy following them. He claims his name is Jimmy Blevins and insists that his handsome bay horse belongs to him. The older boys don't believe him on either count, but John Grady

allows Blevins to cross the river and continue into Mexico with them, over Rawlins' strong objections. After more days of idyllic riding, the boys buy some alcohol from migrant traders and get very drunk along the trail. Blevins then panics when a thunderstorm approaches—many people in his family have been struck and killed by lightning. He runs away from his horse, his gear, even his shirt and pants so he won't be near any metal that would attract lightning. In the morning, his clothes, his horse, and his gun are all gone.



The three boys ride into the village of Encantada, where they find the horse and the gun, now in the possession of village residents. Against his better judgment, and again over Rawlins' objections, John Grady agrees to help Blevins regain his property. But the impetuous Blevins awakes the village when he steals his horse back, and angry villagers ride in hot pursuit of the three boys, who split up outside of town. The posse pursues Blevins on his speedy horse, while John Grady and Rawlins are able to continue their horseback journey south. After crossing the mountains, the two companions arrive in a region of wide

grasslands and help a group of vaqueros herding cattle back to the ranch where they live. John Grady is deeply impressed by the beautiful young woman who rides past them on the trail. That night, the boys join the vaqueros in their bunkhouse after the foreman hires them as ranch hands. The boys sense that they have come to end of their quest.

Chapter 2

John Grady and Rawlins have arrived at the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, an enormous ranch of both grasslands and mountains. The hacienda is owned by

Don Héctor Rocha y Villareal, who splits his time between La Purísima and Mexico City, where his wife lives. The beautiful girl is Alejandra, Rocha's daughter.

John Grady is a gifted horseman, and he uses his almost mystical connection with horses to saddle-break a group of wild mustangs in a matter of days. Impressed, Rocha promotes John Grady to manage his breeding program, centered on a magnificent, newly purchased stallion. The promotion earns the boy his own room in the horse barn. One evening at a grange hall, John Grady dances and walks with Alejandra; on another evening, they cross paths while out riding. Soon, Alejandra's great-aunt Alfonsa summons John Grady to the ranch house for an evening of chess and for a warning that he and Alejandra must not be seen together again, in order to preserve the girl's all-important reputation within her upper-class society.

Alejandra soon seeks John Grady out in the barn for clandestine nighttime horseback rides; then she starts coming to his room, and they become lovers. During this stretch of time, Mexican soldiers come to the ranch but then leave. Rocha sends Alejandra to her mother in Mexico City, then keeps the girl inside the ranch house when she returns. Finally, one night, Mexican soldiers return to the ranch during the night and take John Grady and Rawlins away as prisoners. The boys' idyll is over.

Chapter 3

The soldiers take the two boys on a three-day journey north to Encantada. Rawlins is angry with John Grady, convinced that his friend's foolish affair caused Rocha to turn them over the authorities, but Rawlins pledges to stick with his friend nonetheless. When they are ushered into Encantada's one-room jail, John Grady and Rawlins discover that they have been reunited with Blevins. The reckless younger boy had returned to Encantada to reclaim his gun, and in the process had killed a man. John Grady and Rawlins now stand accused of being accomplices of "the assassin Blevins." Under torture by the local police captain, Rawlins confesses to the false charges. John Grady, however, refuses to abandon the real truth of what happened in favor of the captain's preferred truth. He is not tortured, but the captain and a well-dressed man accompany the three hand-

cuffed boys and their guards on a truck headed south to the prison at Saltillo. Partway there, the truck drives off-road into the countryside, where the captain escorts Blevins into a grove of trees and executes him. Blevins had killed the brother of the well-dressed man, who had paid the captain for the right to kill Blevins. When the man's nerve failed, the captain did the killing.

That night, the captain delivers John Grady and Rawlins to the Saltillo prison and tries one more time for a bribe to get their charges dropped. The boys refuse—they have very little money, and the request violates John Grady's strict cowboy code of honor. They become inmates of the nightmarishly brutal Saltillo, fighting for their lives every day. Toward the end of the first week, the boys are taken to a meeting with Pérez, a wealthy and privileged prisoner, who also offers to arrange their freedom for a price, which the boys again cannot pay. The next day, Rawlins is badly knifed and goes to the infirmary. John Grady has another meeting with Pérez, seeking information about Rawlins. Pérez advises the young man about the need to be a realist, as Mexicans are, rather than a romantic with idealistic notions, as John Grady and other Americans are. Pérez also warns somewhat obliquely that John Grady's life is in danger.

The next day, an apparently professional assassin attacks John Grady in the mess hall. The tersely described fight ends with the assassin dead and John Grady gravely wounded. When the young man is recuperated enough to be released from the infirmary, the prison commandante says that both John Grady and Rawlins are being freed from the prison—the dueña Alfonsa has paid their way out. John Grady is determined to return to La Purísima to speak to Alejandra and reclaim their horses. Rawlins, haunted by Blevins' death, boards a bus and heads back to his Texas home.

Chapter 4

John Grady hitchhikes his way back north to La Purísima, aided as always by the poor, compassionate Mexicans he encounters along the way. At the ranch, great-aunt Alfonsa tells him that Alejandra promised never to see John Grady again in return for Alfonsa's ransoming the young men out of prison. Alfonsa also reveals that Rocha investigated John Grady's involvement with Blevins before turning him over to the Mexican authorities. Alfonsa

then goes into a long discourse about her ill-fated involvement with the revolutionary Madero brothers during Mexico's revolution, and about her conviction that human lives are inevitably drawn into violence and are controlled by an inscrutable fate that perhaps even God has no power over.

John Grady reaches Alejandra by phone, and she agrees to spend one stolen day and night with him in Zacatecas on her way returning from school in Mexico City to La Purísima. Their farewell time together is both beautiful and heart-wrenching, as Alejandra continues to declare both her love for John Grady and her renunciation of him in favor of her family. As she leaves, John Grady feels "something cold and soulless enter him" and imagines it will never leave.

Now, John Grady sets out north once again to reclaim the horses he came to Mexico with—his horse as well as those of Rawlins and Blevins; they are all still in Encantada. He captures the police captain and leaves the town badly wounded but with the three horses and the captain. On a grueling days'-long ride, John Grady evades his pursuers. One morning, a troop of local men of unspecified authority awaken John Grady and take the police captain away in handcuffs while leaving John Grady unharmed and still with his horses.

John Grady continues his horseback journey, back to the Rio Grande and Texas. He then rides the border country for weeks trying to find the rightful owner of Blevins' horse. When John Grady is falsely accused of having a stolen horse, a sympathetic judge clears him, after which the young man goes to the judge's home and spills out his guilt feelings about killing the young man in prison, and about somehow not trying to stop the captain from executing Blevins. The judge assures John Grady that he has retained his integrity and does not need to feel guilty.

Finally, John Grady returns to San Angelo. He very briefly visits Lacey Rawlins, who advises him to get a well-paying job on the oil rigs that are filling the former cattle country. John Grady declines, saying that this area is no longer his country. "Where is your country?" Rawlins asks. "I don't know where it is," John Grady replies. A gulf has opened between the two young men.

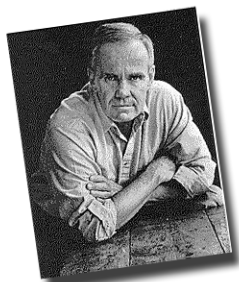
As the novel ends, John Grady observes the burial ceremony at San Angelo's Mexican cemetery for Abuela, the older woman on the Grady ranch who had helped raise John Grady. The novel ends as it began, with John Grady attending a burial service and then riding out of town in a red sunset, his face coppered and the wind red, recalling the similarly vanished Comanche.

Timeline

- early winter 1949** John Grady's grandfather dies; John Grady's mother makes plans to sell the ranch.
- March 1950** John Grady and Rawlins set out on horseback for Mexico.
- 5 days later** John Grady, Rawlins, and Blevins cross the Rio Grande into Mexico.
- many days later** A posse pursues Blevins, John Grady, and Rawlins out of Encantada.
- 5 days later** John Grady and Rawlins sign on as ranch hands at La Purísima.
- May** Don Héctor puts John Grady in charge of his breeding program.
- June** John Grady and Alejandra become lovers.
- 2 weeks later** Soldiers arrest John Grady and Rawlins.
- July, 3 days later** John Grady and Rawlins are jailed in Encantada.
- 3 days later** Blevins is executed; John Grady and Rawlins are incarcerated in the Saltillo prison.
- August** John Grady and Rawlins survive knife attacks, then are released from prison; Rawlins returns to Texas; John Grady returns to La Purísima.
- early September** John Grady meets with Alfonsa at La Purísima.
- several days later** John Grady and Alejandra spend a final day and night together in Zacatecas.
- a week later** John Grady reclaims his horses in Encantada.
- Thanksgiving Day** John Grady crosses back into Texas.
- March 1951** John Grady returns to San Angelo, takes his leave of Rawlins and his family ranch, and rides away to the west.

Author Sketch

Cormac McCarthy was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1933, the third of six siblings. He was originally named Charles, after his father, but he renamed himself Cormac, which means "son of Charles," after an Irish king. In 1937, he moved with his family to Knoxville, Tennessee, where he grew up. He attended the University of Tennessee for the school year 1951-52, then served in the Air Force for four years. He returned to the university in 1957, published two stories in the student literary magazine, won creative writing awards, and left school in 1960 to pursue a writing career. He married and fathered a son, Cullen, but the marriage dissolved.



McCarthy won the first of a series of grants and fellowships following the publication of his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, in 1965. After a period of living and traveling in Europe, McCarthy returned to Tennessee with his second wife, where they lived a bare-bones existence while he continued to publish critically admired but little-read novels. In 1976, McCarthy separated from his wife and moved to El Paso, Texas, and changed his focus from Southern gothic to Western novels. His public obscurity ended in 1992 when his sixth novel, *All the Pretty Horses*, won the National Book Award and became a great popular success. Nevertheless, McCarthy maintained his long-held public reclusiveness, refusing to give interviews or make public appearances. He now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his third wife and their son.

Critic's Corner

Until the publication of *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy was known as a writer's writer, highly admired by literary professionals but largely unknown to the reading public. His first four novels are in the Southern gothic tradition, while his later novels are Westerns. All are infused with McCarthy's distinctive style—lush, evocative depictions of nature coupled with terse, straightforward dialogue and action scenes. The novels typically depict violence and brutality as an inevitable manifestation of human nature. *All the Pretty Horses* exhibits the typical McCarthy style and focus on the darker

side of human nature, but it is also an exuberant adventure tale with sweeping vistas and a sympathetic protagonist. A number of critics declared the novel to be a modern classic. *The New York Times Book Review* admired McCarthy's "finely wrought craftsmanship and ferocious energy." *The Los Angeles Times Book Review* called the novel "a moving and often enthralling story, a compelling portrait of a young man's hungers, a profound empathy for a different culture and a sweet skill in portraying it." *Publishers Weekly* assessed, "This is a novel so exuberant in its prose, so offbeat in its setting and so mordant and profound in its deliberations that one searches in vain for comparisons in American literature." *All the Pretty Horses* is the first volume in *The Border Trilogy*; the third volume, *Cities of the Plain*, brings together John Grady Cole and the protagonist of the second volume, *The Crossing*.

Works By Cormac McCarthy

The Orchard Keeper (1965)
Outer Dark (1968)
Child of God (1974)
Suttree (1979)
Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West (1985)
All the Pretty Horses (The Border Trilogy) (1992)
The Stonemason: A Play in Five Acts (1994)
The Crossing (The Border Trilogy) (1994)
The Gardener's Son: A Screenplay (1996)
Cities of the Plain (The Border Trilogy) (1998)
No Country for Old Men (2005)
The Road (2006)

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Eaton, Mark A., "Dis(re)membered Bodies: Cormac McCarthy's Border Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Spring 2003, pp. 155-80.

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Jarrett, Robert L. *Cormac McCarthy* (Tawayne's U.S. Authors Series). NY: Twayne, 1997.

Owens, Barclay. *Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000.

Southern Quarterly, Spring 2000 (a series of long articles on McCarthy's *Border Trilogy*).

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Woodward, Richard B., "Cormac Country," *Vanity Fair*, August 2005, pp. 98-104.

_____, "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction," *New York Times Magazine*, April 19, 1992, pp. 28-31ff.

Reviews of All the Pretty Horses

Booklist, April 1, 1992, p. 1412

Christian Science Monitor, June 11, 1992, p. 13

Commonweal, September 25, 1992, p. 29

Kirkus Reviews, April 1, 1992, p. 420

Library Journal, May 15, 1992, pp. 120-21

Los Angeles Times Book Review, May 17, 1992, pp. 3, 13

The New York Times Book Review, May 17, 1992, pp. 9, 11

Publishers Weekly, March 16, 1992, p. 64

Spectator, April 17, 1993, pp. 26-27

Washington Post Book Review, May 3, 1992, pp. 1-2

World Literature Today, Winter 1994, p. 128

Internet Sites for Cormac McCarthy

"Cormac McCarthy"
www.answers.com/topic/cormac-mccarthy

"Cormac McCarthy.com—The Official Web Site of the Cormac McCarthy Society"
www.cormacmccarthy.com/

"Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction"
www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html

General Objectives

1. To learn about social life and customs in Mexico in the 1940s and 1950s
2. To become familiar with the events of the Mexican Revolution
3. To analyze the role of the Western myth in American culture

4. To discuss the romantic and the realistic approaches to life
5. To examine the process of moving from innocence to maturation
6. To think about the reasons for the prevalence of violence in human society

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the reasons for John Grady's and Rawlins' horseback journey to Mexico
2. To trace the chain of events that Blevins triggers
3. To note the parallels between the beginning and the ending of the novel
4. To identify the elements of the code of conduct by which John Grady lives his life, and the consequences of following this code
5. To compare and contrast John Grady, Rawlins, and Blevins
6. To trace John Grady's coming-of-age process as the novel unfolds
7. To recognize the roles of Alfonsa, Rocha, Pérez, and the captain as antagonists to John Grady
8. To discuss the ideas about fate that are expressed in the novel
9. To compare differing elements of the author's writing style
10. To analyze the meaning of the novel's title and the symbolism of the novel's sunsets and redness

Literary Terms and Applications

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with these terms.

Coming-of-age Novel: a work of fiction in which the main character moves into and/or through adolescence and develops at least the beginning of maturity; also known as a Bildungsroman. In this novel, John Grady comes of age as he experiences first love and passion, and its loss; and the need to survive violence, brutality, manipulation, and corruption while still attempting to adhere to his code of conduct and his romantic outlook on life.

Historical Novel: a narrative that presents an imaginative series of events occurring in an actual historical setting. The characters may be both fic-

tional and historical. In this novel, the characters are all fictional, although Alfonsa talks about actual historical figures of the Mexican Revolution. The author of a historical novel often does considerable research to incorporate accurate everyday historical detail into the novel. In this case, author Cormac McCarthy has steeped himself in the history of the Texas-North Mexico region, and he has driven all around the landscape that he describes so vividly.

Romantic: having a belief in the innate goodness of human beings and the authenticity of their emotions; often also having a dislike of urban life and the industrialized world. John Grady is a romantic in these senses, as he leaves the rapidly developing Texas ranchland in search of a pastoral, Old West life on the haciendas of Mexico. His romantic view of human beings as noble and akin to horses is shattered by his encounters with violent, manipulative, and corrupt people.

Western: a subgenre of literature whose subject is the Old West of the United States, when the frontier still existed, or had only recently disappeared. The original Westerns were lurid dime novels written for the folks back East. Zane Grey brought some respectability to the genre, injecting a lot of local color into his formulaic plots. Owen Wister created the image of the romantic cowboy hero in *The Virginian* of 1902. Cormac McCarthy extends the subgenre with his masterful, complex writing style and his focus on deeper underlying themes.

The Importance of Setting

The beginning and ending of the novel are set in western and southern Texas, ranchland that is being converted to oil fields. The eighteen-thousand-acre Grady cattle ranch is near San Angelo, and it too will soon be an oil field. The bulk of the novel takes place in northern Mexico. The author's lush, evocative descriptions of the

rugged yet beautiful landscape are a major element of the novel. After a long horseback journey through this landscape, John Grady and Rawlins settle in at La Purísima hacienda, a sprawling cattle ranch set amid mountains and broad grasslands dotted with marshes and shallow lakes. After their arrest, the soldiers take them on a three-day horseback ride to the small town of Encantada, where they are interrogated by the corrupt police captain. They then are incarcerated in the brutal prison in Saltillo, where John Grady is forced to kill a knife-wielding would-be assassin. Out of the prison, John Grady retraces the route to La Purísima, where he has a final interview with Alfonsa in the ranch house. He then embarks on another horseback odyssey through the Mexican landscape, back to Encantada to reclaim the horses, and back with them to Texas, where he spends weeks in the border country searching for the owner of Blevins' horse. Finally, John Grady returns to San Angelo, where he takes leave of Rawlins and his last link to the family ranch and heads off into the west, still searching for the cowboy life that has been the object of his quest.



Cross-Curricular Sources

Audiobooks

All the Pretty Horses, read by Frank Muller (unabridged, 7 cassettes, Harper Audio, 2000)

All the Pretty Horses, read by Brad Pitt (abridged, CD, Random House Audio, 2000)

Books—Fiction

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*

José Atonio Burciaga, *Drink Cultura: Chicanismo*

Lois Brown, ed., *Tales of the Wild West: An Illustrated Collection of Adventure Stories*

Rosario Castellanos, *The Nine Guardians*

William Faulkner, "Spotted Horses" (short story)

Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Elmer Kelton, *The Wolf and the Buffalo*

Jack Kerouac, *One the Road*

Larry McMurtry, *The Last Picture Show* and *Lonesome Dove*

Charles Portis, *True Grit*

Tim Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*

C. P. Rosenthal, *Elena of the Stars*

B. Traven, *The Jungle Novels* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*

Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

Larry Watson, *Justice and Montana 1948*

Chap Weaver, *A Little Bit Dead*

Books—Nonfiction

Bruce Berger, *The Telling Distance: Conversations with the American Desert*

Dee Brown, *Wondrous Times on the Frontier*

Elwyn Hartley, *The Ultimate Horse Book*

Tony Hillerman, ed., *The Best of the West: An Anthology of Classic Writing from the American West*

Albert Marrin, *Cowboys, Indians, and Gunfighters: The Story of the Cattle Kingdom*

Rebecca Stefoff, *Independence and Revolution in Mexico, 1810-1940*

R. Conrad Stein, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920*

CD-ROM

American Journey—History in Your Hands: The Native-American Experience (Primary Source Media)

American Journey—History in Your Hands: Westward Expansion (Primary Source Media)

Writer's Workshop 2: High School Program (Holt Rinehart & Winston)

Internet

"'All the Pretty Horses' by Cormac McCarthy Read by Brad Pitt"

archive.salon.com/audio/fiction/2001/04/17/mccarthy/index.html

"American West"

www.americanwest.com/

"Comanche Lodge"

www.comanchelodge.com

"Cormac McCarthy.com—The Official Web Site of the Cormac McCarthy Society"

www.cormacmccarthy.com/

"The Cowboy"

www.imh.org/imh/kyhpl5a.html#xtocid119174

"New Perspectives on the West"

www.pbs.org/weta/thewest

"A Savage Season: A Tribute to Cormac McCarthy" (photos and music)

www.delcaldo.com/asavageseason/

"Wild Horses: An American Romance"

net.unl.edu/artsFeat/wildhorses/

Video/DVD

All the Pretty Horses (Miramax)

Domesticating a Wilderness (Alistair Cooke's America) (BBC/Time-Life)

The Frontier: Rediscovering America (Discovery Channel School)

Lonesome Dove (Hallmark Home Entertainment)

True Stories of the American West (White Star/Kultur)

The West (PBS)

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *All the Pretty Horses* should include these aspects.

Themes

- coming of age
- innocence
- maturation
- friendship
- love
- loyalty
- violence
- corruption
- ending of a way of life
- honor
- fate
- death
- alienation
- conflict and rebellion
- romanticism vs. realism
- survival

Motifs

- horses
- sunsets
- the color red
- dreams
- Spanish language
- Mexican culture
- funerals

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the chapter and page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. ... the old Comanche road came down out of the Kiowa country to the north (Ch. 1, p. 5)
(The Comanche and the Kiowa were two of the Native American peoples who lived in the Southwest when the region was being settled by whites. Most of them were gone by the late 1800s. Just as the Comanche and Kiowa were driven out and decimated by white settlement, so now are cowboys and their way of life being driven out by the mechanization and industrialization of the region.)
2. They hobbled the horses and turned them out to graze. (Ch. 1, p. 35)
(To hobble a horse is to fasten its legs together so the horse cannot stray. When they rest during the day and camp at night, John Grady and Rawlins always hobble their horses so they won't wander off while they are grazing.)
3. Rawlins was trying to get his soogan tied on behind the saddle. (Ch. 1, p. 30)
(A soogan is a bedroll, the classic cowboy bedding—rolled up and carried behind the saddle by day, unrolled and slept on by the campfire at night. Sleeping on bedrolls is part of the cowboy-life adventure the two friends are embarked on.)
4. You can make a hackamore out of that. (Ch. 1, p. 81)
(A hackamore is a halter for a horse with reins but no bit for the mouth. Blevins will make a hackamore for his horse so he can control the animal when he rides out of Encantada bareback. Later, John Grady and Rawlins make hackamores to use when they are breaking the wild mustangs at the hacienda.)
5. ... a gravel wash (Ch. 1, p. 85) ... the arroyo (Ch. 1, p. 87)

(A wash is a dry bed of a stream; an arroyo is a dry creek or river bed, or a water-carved gully or channel. Washes and arroyos are common features of this landscape, and the boys lead their horses into them when they want to stay out of sight.)

6. vaqueros ... the caporal of the vaqueros ... the gerente ... (Ch. 1, pp. 93-95) ... the hacendado ... (Ch. 2, p. 98)
(These are the men of La Purísima hacienda. The vaqueros are the cowboys, the men who tend to the cattle. The caporal is their foreman, while the gerente is the hacienda's manager. The hacendado is the owner or head of a hacienda—in this case, the owner, Don Héctor Rocha y Villareal, father of Alejandra.)
7. She'd been riding the horse in the ciénagas. (Ch. 1, p. 94)
(A ciénaga is a swamp or marsh. Alejandra frequently rides her horse in the ciénagas or the fringe of the lake.)
8. They sat side by side in the little alameda. (Ch. 3, p. 154)
(An alameda is a boulevard. John Grady and Rawlins are allowed to sit on a bench in Encantada's main street before being taken to the jail. Other towns that John Grady passes through have considerably more, and also less, impressive alamedas.)
9. The man was dressed after the manner of a charro. (Ch. 3, p. 173)
(A charro is a picturesque Mexican cowboy. This man has paid the captain to give him an opportunity to murder Blevins, who shot the charro's brother to death. Later, John Grady reclaims his horse and his friends' horses from the charro and from a ranch that the charro leads him to.)
10. Are you a cuchillero? (Ch. 3, p. 192)
(A cuchillero is a person skilled with the use of knives. John Grady deduces from his interview with Pérez that a paid assassin will emerge soon, no doubt wielding a knife.)

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.

Literal Level (Questions 1-4)

1. Why do John Grady and Rawlins leave San Angelo and ride on horseback to Mexico?
(John Grady has always planned to live his life as a cowboy running his family's cattle ranch in Texas. But his grandfather's death shatters that plan. The ranch has passed to John Grady's mother, who will sell it for its potential for oil. Other cattle ranches in the region are likewise being converted to oil fields. John Grady senses that the cowboy era of the American Southwest is ending, and he thinks that it may still be possible to live the cowboy way of life on the cattle ranches of northern Mexico. He has convinced his best friend, Lacey Rawlins, to run away with him; Rawlins simply looks forward to being part of an exciting adventure.)
2. What chain of events that engulfs John Grady and Rawlins does Blevins trigger?
(Blevins loses his horse and gun when he panics on the night of the thunderstorm. When John Grady and Rawlins ride away from Encantada with Blevins on his reacquired horse, they are marked as Blevins' accomplices. After Blevins is arrested for killing a man when he returns to Encantada for his gun, the Mexican authorities track down and arrest John Grady and Rawlins also. Even though the two friends are in no way involved with the killings, they are sent to prison as accomplices of Blevins. In order to get them ransomed out of the brutal prison, Alejandra must pledge to her great-aunt Alfonsa never to see John Grady again. The love affair between John Grady and Alejandra is now doomed, and the boys' idyllic cowboy life at La Purísima is also ended.)
3. What parallels do you find between the beginning and the ending of the novel?
(The novel begins and ends with John Grady attending a grave-side funeral service—his grandfather's at the beginning and Abuela's at the ending. After John Grady rides to the west following his grandfather's funeral, he rides into a blood-red wind and a blood-red sunset that coppers his face, and he senses the ghosts of the Comanche who were long ago driven out of this homeland of theirs. As he rides west in the novel's final scene, John Grady again rides west into a blood-red sunset that coppers his face and into a blood-red wind, and he passes a silent group of Indians, a small remnant of their people, still camping on the plains in their wikipus.)

4. What are the elements of the "cowboy code" of life that John Grady has developed and lives his life in accordance with?
(John Grady's code of conduct calls for a life of personal integrity. Following this code calls for John Grady to value honor, resist injustice, and tell the truth and do the right thing always. He is skillful, courageous, stoic, loyal, respectful, and thoughtful. He expresses himself much more through actions than via words. When he does speak it is tersely and modestly, with emotions repressed.)

Interpretive Level (Questions 5-8)

5. Compare and contrast John Grady, Rawlins, and Blevins.
(John Grady is resolute, scrupulously honest, loyal, thoughtful, stoic, and slow to speak. He expresses himself much more through action than through words. He is a gifted horseman, and he has a romantic view of the cowboy life. Rawlins takes his lead from John Grady, but he is less resolute and less thoughtful than his friend, more prone to speak and impatient to act. He is a well-skilled cowboy but lacks John Grady's special gift with horses. Blevins is immature and ruled by impulse, and he is highly sensitive about any affront to his dignity, which makes him foolishly determined to regain his lost property. Like the other boys, he is a good horseman, and he is a remarkably good shot.)
6. In what ways does John Grady come of age in the course of this novel?
(John Grady sets out from San Angelo in pursuit of his romantic vision of the cowboy life that is passing from the American West. He views human beings as akin to horses, full of vitality and an "ardenthearted" spirit. He expects all thinking people to value truth and justice and an honorable code of conduct. By the end of his journey, John Grady has come to realize that most people act in their own self-interest and are more than willing to manipulate the truth and pervert justice. He now accepts violence and pain as an integral part of life. He has also tasted the sweetness and intensity of first love, but has had to accept that it can be manipulated and crushed. By the end of his coming of age, John Grady has become more realistic about the world and people, but he still retains his essential romantic view of the cowboy life and his romantic determination to continue to adhere to his code of conduct.)
7. In what ways do Alfonsa, Rocha, Pérez, and the captain act as antagonists to John Grady?
(Alfonsa thwarts the romance between John Grady and Alejandra by manipulating Alejandra into telling her father about the affair, and by extracting a promise from Alejandra never to see John Grady again in return for Alfonsa ransoming

the two Americans out of prison, and by denying John Grady permission to court Alejandra. Rocha investigates the Mexican authorities' charges against John Grady and finds out about John Grady's association with Blevins, which John Grady had lied about to Rocha; this causes Rocha to turn John Grady and Rawlins over to the Mexican authorities. Pérez presents a more realistic world view to John Grady, which he counsels the young man to adopt. Soon after John Grady rejects Pérez's advice and fails to bribe him for protection, the assassin attempts to kill the young man. The captain rejects John Grady's truthful version of his involvement with Blevins and consigns John Grady and Rawlins to the brutal Saltillo prison when they are unable and refuse to bribe the captain to make the charges against them go away.)

8. What ideas about fate are expressed in the novel?

(In her long discourse to John Grady, Alfonsa expresses several views of fate. People are shaped by forces they cannot control as events play out that they are often helpless to alter. The world is a puppet show, with the strings of puppets at one level manipulated by another set of puppets above, who in turn are manipulated by yet other puppets, and so on, in an endless sequence. Even God is powerless to change the inevitable human manifestations of greed, foolishness, and blood-lust, Alfonsa says. By the end of his journey, John Grady too sees that the world's pain and its beauty will forever be counterpoints to one another. On a much simpler level, Rawlins repeatedly, and accurately, warns about the dire consequences that ensue from becoming involved with Blevins.)

Critical Level (Questions 9-11)

9. Compare the differences in the author's writing style between the landscape descriptions and the action and dialogue sequences.

(McCarthy's landscape descriptions are reminiscent of Faulkner's style—long, lush sentences that beautifully evoke the sweeping open vistas of the natural setting. The action sequences, on the other hand, are straightforward and unadorned, directly describing what is happening. Similarly, most of the dialogue exchanges consist of short, laconic lines with little punctuation.)

10. What is the meaning of the novel's title?

(Horses play a central role in the novel. John Grady has an almost mystical connection with horses, which is central to his romantic vision of living a cowboy life, and his gift for working with horses earns him a privileged position at the Rocha ranch. At the beginning of his journey, John Grady views men as kindred in nature to the ardent-hearted, spiritual horse, with a similar collective soul. This idealized view of people and horses is reflected in the novel's title, which is a line from a sweet baby lullaby. The title is ultimately ironic, as John Grady's view of men

as being like the noble horse is quite changed by the novel's end, by which time John Grady has absorbed many lessons about the unjust, manipulative, and brutal nature of human beings and the world.)

11. How do sunsets and redness function as symbols in the novel?

(A recurring theme of the novel is endings—John Grady's life on his family ranch is ending, the cowboy way of life in the American West is ending—and the novel's frequent sunset scenes symbolize this theme of ending. The sunset scenes are imbued with the color red—for example, "the sun sat blood red," "reefs of bloodred cloud," "the red wind," "bloodred dust." These images of blood red underscore the recurrence of bloody violence throughout the novel.)

Creative Level (Questions 12-14)

12. Write several paragraphs or a short story about Jimmy Blevins before he joins up with John Grady and Rawlins. What is his real name? How did he come into possession of his horse? Why is he traveling alone on horseback?

13. Write a letter from Alejandra to John Grady in which she more fully expresses her love for him and explains why she has turned her back on him and their love.

14. In his last meeting with Rawlins, John Grady tells his friend that this section of Texas that once was his home is no longer his country. When Rawlins asks where his country is, John Grady responds that he doesn't know. What do you think John Grady's new "country" would be?

Across the Curriculum

Science and Health

1. Create an illustrated field guide to, or multimedia presentation of, the flora and fauna of western Texas and northern Mexico that are mentioned in the novel.
2. Research and report on medical treatment for a gunshot wound like the one that John Grady suffers, then and now. Why would John Grady have cauterized the wound with a red-hot pistol barrel, and why does the judge say the wound might have led to gangrene?

3. The first wife of John Grady's grandfather died in a flu epidemic of the early 1900s. Explain these epidemics, including the worldwide flu pandemic of 1918, and relate them scientifically to today's concerns about pandemics of other types of flu.

Mathematics

1. Convert the size of La Purísima's hacienda from hectares and leagues into U.S. measures (see Chapter 2, p. 97 of the novel). Then superimpose this expanse on a map to show how much of your region La Purísima's hacienda would encompass.
2. Graphically compare the sizes of the Grady family cattle ranch and La Purísima cattle ranch.
3. Convert the amounts that John Grady and Rawlins pay for various purchases during their journey into today's dollars.
4. Use today's exchange rate to figure out what it would cost to purchase items of your choice in Mexican pesos as converted to U.S. dollars.

Language Arts

1. Translate the Spanish terms and the Spanish language in the novel into English. Allocate this activity among classmates.
2. Emulate Cormac McCarthy's writing style by writing one long, evocative landscape descriptive passage and a contrasting terse dialogue passage or a matter-of-fact action passage.
3. Discuss with classmates in what ways *All the Pretty Horses* both fits and rejects the standard conventions of the Western genre novel.
4. Trace the influences of both William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway in the writing style of this novel.
5. Add standard punctuation and speaker identification to some passages of the dialogue in this novel. What differences in effect do you find?

Art

1. Create illustrations of characters from the novel, some of whom, like John Grady, are barely physically described in the text. Either draw your own, or find illustrations in the media that fit your mental image of what these characters may look like.
2. Create an illustration that expresses your artwork's title, "All the Pretty Horses."
3. Create art or a multimedia presentation of the Mexican and Texas landscapes that are so evocatively described in the novel.

Music

1. Play a recording of the lullaby "All the Pretty Horses" for classmates and then discuss the possible reasons why its title was chosen as the novel's title.
2. Play or perform traditional cowboy songs for classmates. Discuss how these songs express the cowboy-life reality and the American West myth. Which songs might apply to John Grady and Rawlins and Blevins?

Social Studies

1. Research and report on the history of the Comanche, with a focus on their history in Texas. How does this relate to John Grady's situation?
2. Draw up a timeline of Texas history.
3. Research and report on the invention of barbed wire and its impact on the American West.
4. Detail the gap between Mexican peasants and the landed class at the time of the novel's events, and explore any ways in which this gap has altered today.
5. Research and report on Mexico's revolution, with a focus on the events that Alfonsa relates to John Grady.
6. Set out what you might see as the positives and negatives of women's place in Mexican society at the time of the novel. How has this affected Alfonsa? Alejandra?

Geography

1. On a map of Texas and Mexico, trace John Grady's journey to and from San Angelo.
2. Research and report on the size and location of Mexico's cattle ranches today.

Student Involvement Activities

1. View the video of this novel. Then discuss with classmates elements such as the characterizations, the plot alterations and/or omissions, and the themes expressed.
2. The protagonist of this novel has some vivid dreams that have their origin in his recent experiences. What dreams of this kind have you had? What triggered them?
3. With classmates, create a meal featuring the Mexican foods mentioned in the novel.
4. Do a class presentation about what to do to keep yourself safe if you are outdoors and lightning strikes are imminent.
5. Act out favorite scenes from the novel with classmates, such as the recapture of Blevins' horse from Encantada and the boys' escape followed by pursuers.
6. Find images and descriptions of the Rio Grande border crossing area near Langtry, Texas, where John Grady and his companions cross. What is different today from then? What is similar?
7. With classmates discuss the myth and the realities of the American West—why and how the myth developed and became widespread, the impact it has had, and recent revisions that purport to offer a more realistic version of the West.
8. With classmates who are also involved with horses, create a glossary and an illustration of the many horse-related terms referred to and described in the novel.
9. Join classmates to view and identify constellations in the night sky and learn about the legends behind them.

10. Discuss with classmates the possibilities and advisability of pursuing a romantic versus a realistic vision of a way of life. Should a person's life plan pursue one or the other? When or if should an adjustment be made according to what is happening in a person's life?

Alternate Assessment

1. Draw up a detailed character list for the novel under two headings, major characters and minor characters. List each character's name, give a brief character description (for those you have enough information about), and tell what role she or he plays in the life of John Grady.
2. On a map of Texas and northern Mexico, trace the novel's action. Locate and label as many of the places mentioned in the novel as you can. Write a brief summary of what happens at each place. Create a map key to link the locations on the map with the event summaries.
3. Create a timeline of the novel's action. For each event on the time line, briefly describe the event and tell who takes part in it.

Vocabulary

Match each underlined word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- | | | | |
|-----------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| A. haze | F. decreased in force | K. marked by ridges | P. assembled |
| B. unruly | G. urging earnestly | L. ran swiftly | Q. secluded |
| C. show | H. made a mock attack | M. in an evil way | R. cautious |
| D. coils | I. group of attendants | N. small stream | S. beggars |
| E. silent | J. clear, transparent | O. mechanical | T. modestly |

- ___ 1. The wind was much abated.
- ___ 2. A translucent slush had begun to form along the edge of the blacktop.
- ___ 3. They rode at once jaunty and circumspect, like thieves newly loosed.
- ___ 4. A thin blue rivulet of drainwater ran down the clay gully.
- ___ 5. The woman smiled and nodded demurely.
- ___ 6. The coyotes convened over the carcass of the deer, fighting and squalling like cats.
- ___ 7. On the foreland plain they saw vaqueros driving cattle before them through a gauze of golden dust.
- ___ 8. Skeins of light off the water played upon the black hide of the horse.
- ___ 9. In the dream he himself could run with the horses and they coursed the young mares and fillies over the plain.
- ___ 10. The guards had about them a perfunctory air, like men accustomed to caring for livestock.
- ___ 11. Blevins limped away, looking back once mute and terrified.
- ___ 12. They squatted and leaned against the wall with their blankets about the shoulders like mendicants.
- ___ 13. John Grady watched everywhere for the cuchillero who would manifest himself from among the anonymous eyes that watched back.
- ___ 14. He swung the tray and the cuchillero ducked and feinted and came forward.
- ___ 15. He looked to be adjuring John Grady to read something writ there.
- ___ 16. The land stood out pale and serried in the clear morning air.
- ___ 17. He walked through the narrow twisting streets and small sequestered plazas.
- ___ 18. He felt something cold and soulless enter him like another being and he imagined that it smiled malignly.
- ___ 19. The horse was fractious in the traffic and it skittered about in the street.
- ___ 20. After a while the funeral cortege appeared.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. You will use each name only once.

- A. John Grady
- B. Alejandra
- C. Blevins
- D. Alfonsa
- E. Lacey Rawlins
- F. John Grady's mother
- G. Gustavo Madero
- H. Don Héctor
- I. the captain
- J. Pérez

- ___ 1. Person who plans to sell the Grady family ranch.
- ___ 2. Owner of La Purísima ranch.
- ___ 3. Person who is arrested for shooting and killing a man.
- ___ 4. Young man who lives his life according to a cowboy code of honorable behavior.
- ___ 5. Local law officer who murders a prisoner.
- ___ 6. Person who was killed during the Mexican Revolution.
- ___ 7. Person who attends school in Mexico City.
- ___ 8. Person with a horse named Junior.
- ___ 9. Person who pays a ransom to get John Grady and Rawlins out of prison.
- ___ 10. Prison inmate who can arrange for the release of prisoners.

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions.

- 1. Who is the author of this novel? _____
- 2. In which U.S. state have John Grady and Rawlins always lived? _____
- 3. Who has recently died as the novel begins? _____
- 4. What is John Grady's last name? _____
- 5. What type of transportation do John Grady and Rawlins use on their journey south?

- 6. What river do the boys cross when they go from one country to another?

- 7. What possession does Blevins return to reclaim after getting his horse back?

- 8. What is the word for ranch in Spanish? _____
- 9. What color is Alejandra's Arabian saddle horse? _____
- 10. What is the name of John Grady's horse? _____
- 11. In which ranch building do Alejandra and John Grady spend nights together?

- 12. What board game does John Grady play with Alfonsa? _____
- 13. In which town are the boys locked up in a one-room jail? _____
- 14. What weapon does the cuchillero use when he tried to kill John Grady? _____
- 15. To whom does John Grady confess his feelings of guilt about what he has done?

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III. Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. On the plain by his home, John Grady senses the ghosts of the (**Apache, Comanche, Nez Perce, Cheyenne**).
2. John Grady's father supports himself with his income from (**preaching, ranching, horse trading, gambling**).
3. Lacey Rawlins is (**seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, nineteen**) years old.
4. In John Grady's home region, many ranches once devoted to raising cattle are now producing (**cotton, horses, oil, coal**).
5. Alejandra and John Grady spend one last day and night together in (**Zacatecas, Saltillo, La Vega, Torreón**).
6. John Grady's closest friend at Don Héctor's ranch, beside Rawlins, is (**Arturo, Alfonso, Gustavo, Antonio**).
7. Alejandra has beautiful (**green, blue, brown, black**) eyes.
8. John Grady often dreams about (**horses, God, sunsets, prison**).
9. The captain repeatedly calls Blevins a(n) (**coward, cuchillero, assassin, charro**).
10. Don Héctor promotes John Grady to the position of (**vaquero, breeder, caporal, bodyguard**).

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What does the novel show about the differences among social classes in Mexico at the time this story takes place?
2. What role does violence play in this novel?
3. What forces thwart the love affair between Alejandra and John Grady?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke the words. Write the letter of the character on the line next to the quotation number. Use each name only once.

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|----------------|
| A. John Grady | E. Lacey Rawlins | H. Don Héctor |
| B. Alejandra | F. John Grady's father | I. the captain |
| C. Blevins | G. the judge | J. Pérez |
| D. Alfonsa | | |

- ___ 1. "It was my horse and my saddle and my gun."
- ___ 2. "We can make the truth here. Or we can lose it. But when you leave here it will be too late. Too late for the truth."
- ___ 3. "We're dead. We're dead men. I know it'd come to this. From the time I first seen him."
- ___ 4. "Son, I'm fixin to ask you three questions and if you can answer em the horse is yours."
- ___ 5. "It's not a matter of right. It is a matter of who must say. In this matter I get to say."
- ___ 6. "Last conversation we had was in San Diego California in nineteen forty-two. It aint her fault. I aint the same as I was."
- ___ 7. "I do not live here so very good. I must have money to make my own arrangements and this is a very expensive business."
- ___ 8. "There aint but one truth. The truth is what happened. It ain't what come out of somebody's mouth."
- ___ 9. "Why do I bother myself? Eh? She will go. Who am I? A father. A father is nothing."
- ___ 10. "She tells me I must be my own person and with every breath she tries to make me her person."

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

Write one or two words in each blank to make each statement true.

- 1. The ranch where John Grady and Rawlins find work is in the country of _____.
- 2. John Grady and Rawlins are from the U.S. town of _____.
- 3. At both the beginning and the end of this novel, John Grady attends a(n) _____.
- 4. Blevins is very skilled at using the _____ he carries with him.
- 5. John Grady is exceptionally gifted at working with _____.
- 6. John Grady and Rawlins work at the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de _____ Concepción.
- 7. Blevins is terrified of _____ because of family history.
- 8. The principal livestock on Don Héctor's ranch is _____.
- 9. The Spanish ranch hands—the Spanish cowboys—are called _____.
- 10. The ranch hands, including Rawlins, eat and sleep in the _____.
- 11. Alfonsa lost two of her _____ in a shooting accident.
- 12. John Grady and Rawlins become inmates of a brutal prison in the town of _____.
- 13. Alejandra attends school in _____, where her mother lives.
- 14. Alfonsa and the Madero brothers were involved in this historical event: the _____.
- 15. The real Jimmy Blevins is a radio _____.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III. Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. John Grady's mother is pursuing a career as a(n) **(teacher, horse breeder, actress, poet)**.
2. Rawlins travels back home to his parents on a **(horse, bus, pickup truck, small plane)**.
3. John Grady is **(fifteen, nineteen, seventeen, sixteen)** years old.
4. The adventurous journey of John Grady and Rawlins takes place in the **(1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s)**.
5. The name of Rawlins' horse is **(Charro, Junior, Redbo, Tex)**.
6. The **(commandante, hacendado, gerente, charro)** bribes the police captain for the right to kill Blevins.
7. At the end of the novel, John Grady watches the graveside funeral of **(his father, Abuela, Luisa, Armando)**.
8. Alfonsa is Alejandra's **(grandmother, mother, great-aunt, aunt)**.
9. In prison, John Grady buys a contraband **(knife, gun, chain, truncheon)** to defend himself.
10. This novel frequently uses a **(death, lightning storm, sunset, dream)** to signify an ending.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. In what ways is John Grady's "cowboy code" of conduct challenged by the experiences that confront John Grady?
2. What is the relationship between Alejandra and Alfonsa, literally and emotionally? What effects does each have on the other?
3. In what ways does the novel depict women?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. P | 11. E | 16. K |
| 2. J | 7. A | 12. S | 17. Q |
| 3. R | 8. D | 13. C | 18. M |
| 4. N | 9. L | 14. H | 19. B |
| 5. T | 10. O | 15. G | 20. I |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Cormac McCarthy | 9. black |
| 2. Texas | 10. Redbo |
| 3. grandfather Grady | 11. barn |
| 4. Cole | 12. chess |
| 5. horses | 13. Encantada |
| 6. Rio Grande | 14. knife |
| 7. gun/pistol | 15. the judge |
| 8. hacienda | |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Comanche | 6. Antonio |
| 2. gambling | 7. blue |
| 3. seventeen | 8. horses |
| 4. oil | 9. assassin |
| 5. Zacatecas | 10. breeder |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

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

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

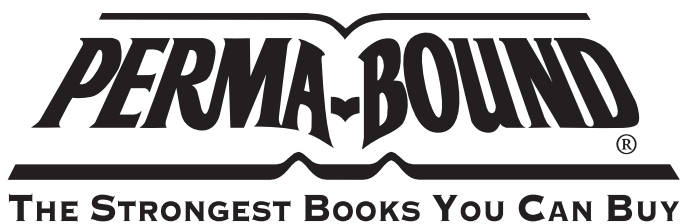
- | | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mexico | 9. vaqueros |
| 2. San Angelo | 10. bunkhouse |
| 3. funeral | 11. fingers |
| 4. gun/pistol | 12. Saltillo |
| 5. horses | 13. Mexico City |
| 6. la Purísima | 14. Mexican Revolution |
| 7. lightning | 15. preacher |
| 8. cattle | |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. actress | 6. charro |
| 2. bus | 7. Abuela |
| 3. sixteen | 8. great-aunt |
| 4. 1950s | 9. knife |
| 5. Junior | 10. sunset |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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