



Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy

by Gary D. Schmidt

Teacher's Guide

Written By Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

The novel opens in 1912 when thirteen-year-old Turner Buckminster, his father, and his mother arrive in Phippsburg, Maine, from Boston because his father has taken a job as the town's new minister. Friendless and feeling the burden of being the new preacher's son, Turner tries to fit in but strikes out in the baseball game the first night. Willis Hurd, a boy around Turner's age, is a fierce pitcher and mocks him. Turner meets the boys again, but a friendship fails to take hold when Turner refuses to jump off a cliff with them into the ocean. On the way home, Turner meets Mrs. Cobb, who berates him for not wearing a shirt. Later he meets kindly old Mrs. Hurd, who understands the difficulty he faces because of his father's position in the town. The action shifts to Lizzie Bright Griffin, a black girl Turner's age who is playing in the ocean off her home on Malaga Island.

Chapter 2

The community elders, including Deacon Hurd and Sheriff Elwell, discuss their plans to drive the blacks from Malaga Island, an impoverished community settled by freed or possibly escaped slaves. The community elders want to use the land for a resort. The racist men also mock Turner. As punishment for a minor infraction (walking down the street shirtless), Turner's father makes the boy visit elderly Mrs. Cobb, read to her. Turner gets into a fight with Willis, resulting in Turner's getting blood all over his shirt. Meanwhile, the village elders visit Lizzie and her grandfather and guardian, Preacher Griffin, to drive all the blacks off their land. Lizzie's grandfather, a strong and forthright man, stands up for his rights and refuses to move his people from the Island. He points to the graveyard as his deed to the land.

Chapter 3

Turner's father berates Turner yet again, this time for taking off his bloody shirt and washing it in Mrs. Cobb's house. Turner feels the sting of his father's disappointment in him. Turner meets Lizzie and they strike up an unlikely friendship. She teaches him a better way to bat and they have fun. Back home, Turner's mother has set out some clothes that do not mark him as a minister's son, showing that she at least understands the difficulty he is having fitting in to the community.

Chapter 4

Turner spends time with Lizzie, learning the wonders of the Maine coast. The racist town elders visit Reverend Buckminster to enlist his help in their plan to destroy the shacks on Malaga Island and to remove the community, including 60 graves. The Reverend suggests he'll join them in their plan.

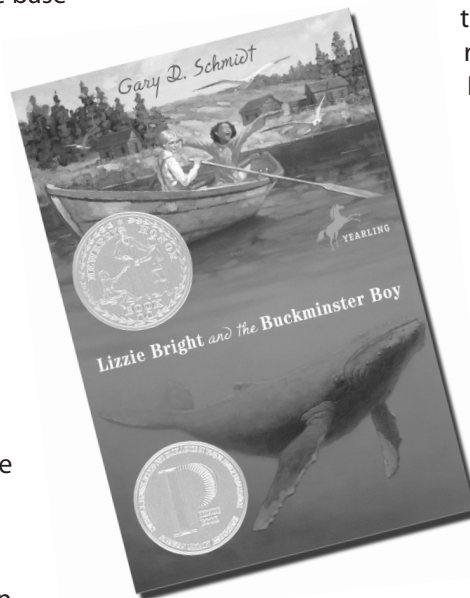
Chapter 5

The Reverend forbids Turner from setting foot on Malaga Island, so he meets Lizzie off the Island. One day she falls on the rocks and suffers a concussion. Turner frantically loads her into her small boat and tries to row her back to the island. Along the way, they pass a pod of whales, which entrance him. He tries to

touch one. When Turner finally reaches land, he is met by a huge and disapproving rescue party. The village elders are shocked and horrified that he has tried to save a black girl. Mr. Stonecrop pressures the Reverend saying his congregation will tell him what it wants him to think.

Chapter 6

Not surprisingly, the Reverend again forbids Turner from setting foot on Malaga Island. Turner visits Mrs. Cobb, who reminds him that he must write down her last words if she dies in his presence. Turner sneaks over to the shore again, and this time he is grounded for the next two weeks. To Turner's delight, Lizzie visits him at his house. The next day, Lizzie shows up at Mrs. Cobb's house to join the elderly lady and Turner as he plays the



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organ for her. Mrs. Cobb is shocked to see a black girl in her house.

Chapter 7

But Mrs. Cobb adjusts and this unlikely threesome takes comfort in the music. One day on his way to Mrs. Cobb's house, Turner notices that Mrs. Hurd's house is all closed up. It emerges that Mr. Hurd has sent his mother to the Home for the Feeble-Minded in Pownal because he wants to sell her fine house to finance the beginning of his real estate plans. Mrs. Hurd was neither feeble-minded nor insane, and Turner is shocked at Deacon Hurd's action. Meanwhile, the Reverend begins Turner's education, home-schooling him in the classics. Turner must read the books in the original and prepare summaries and translations. Later, Turner sees that the blacks have indeed been evicted from their homes: the Tripp family floats their home down the water to a new location.

Chapter 8

When the residents of Phippsburg refuse to let the Tripps land their home on their shores, the Tripps' plight comes to the attention of the newspapers. The village elders are horrified to have their "good name" smeared this way, for they believe they are completely without blame. Turner's father gives Turner a copy of Darwin's *Origin of Species* to read, saying that the right book can ignite a fire in your mind. When Lizzie doesn't show up at Mrs. Cobb's house, both Turner and Mrs. Cobb are concerned, but Turner does not know where she is. Turner is shocked when Mrs. Cobb reveals her admiration for Lizzie and orders him to find her and make sure that she is safe. Turner goes to the island and finds that Lizzie's grandfather is very ill. Later, Turner plays a baseball game and deliberately strikes out, humiliating the village elders who aimed to humiliate him. Turner's mother backs Turner's actions, even though it meant that the Reverend was humiliated as well. That night, Turner comes across Willis repainting the shutters of his grandmother's house in an act of defiance against his father and a show of love for his grandmother. Willis realizes that his father is a racist who turned against his own mother to make a profit. Turner joins Willis painting, and the two boys form a strong bond against injustice.

Chapter 9

Lizzie arrives while Turner is playing the organ for Mrs. Cobb. As he plays, it appears that Mrs. Turner has died. She revives, complains about the heat, and asks for a ginger ale. The kids go to get her the drink and find her dead upon their return from the kitchen. Turner dutiful-

ly writes down her last words. At the funeral, Turner's father makes up more suitable last words for her. Everyone is shocked to learn that Mrs. Cobb has left her house to Turner and the village elders pressure Turner and his father to turn the house over to them. Turner visits Lizzie and she tells him that her grandfather has died.

Chapter 10

Turner tells Lizzie that he wants to give her and a black family named Eason the house, but she refuses, saying that the townspeople will never allow blacks to live in their midst. One night Turner sneaks into the house and Sheriff Elwell chases him and menaces him. The sheriff reveals that the town has had Lizzie and the Easons sent to the mental institution. Turner stands up to the racism of the town. His father, finally proud of him, stands with him against racism. When the sheriff attacks Turner, his father comes to his aid and the sheriff pushes the Reverend over the cliff.

Chapter 11

The Reverend is alive, but barely. The Board of Deacons of the First Congregational Church fires the Reverend, over Mr. Newton's objections. The Reverend dies and the funeral is held. Mr. Newton takes Turner to the asylum so he can rescue Lizzie. Turner finds that she died shortly after arriving at the institution.

Chapter 12

Turner and his mother move into the house. Mr. Stonecrop tries to buy the house, but Turner refuses to sell. In May, Mr. Stonecrop's shipyard fails and he absconds. Deacon Hurd also suffers a financial downturn; Turner buys their small boat. Mrs. Buckminster takes the Hurds in. Willis and Turner garden and work on a lobster boat. Turner sees the whales again, which releases all the emotion he has kept bottled inside. He cries and realizes what the whales and his father had to tell him about humanity and human connection.

Timeline of Maine History

- 1000 A.D.** Norse sailors, led by Leif Erikson, arrive in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Evidence suggests that they may have reached as far south as Maine.
- 1524** Giovanni da Verranzano becomes the first confirmed European to explore the coast of Maine.
- 1604** French contingency led by Pierre du Guast, Sieur de Monts, establishes the first recorded European colony in Maine.

- 1607** British establish the Fort Popham Colony which does not last the brutal winter.
- 1622** Sir Ferdinando Gorges and John Mason are granted rights to lands which make up what is now Maine and New Hampshire. Gorges calls the territory "Maine."
- 1652** Massachusetts annexes Maine as a frontier territory. Massachusetts officials consider Maine the first line of defense against potential French and Indian invasions.
- 1675** King Phillip's War
- 1775** First naval battle of the Revolutionary War occurs off the coast of Machias.
- 1775** Benedict Arnold marches a band of revolutionaries through Maine in a failed attempt to capture British strongholds in Quebec City and Montreal.
- 1794** Bowdoin College becomes Maine's first postsecondary institution.
- 1820** Maine becomes a state.
- 1839** Governor Fairfield declares war on England over a boundary dispute between New Brunswick and northern Maine.
- 1842** Webster Ashburton Treaty settles the Maine/New Brunswick border dispute.
- 1851** Harriet Beecher Stowe begins writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Brunswick, Maine.
- 1860** Maine native Hannibal Hamlin is named Abraham Lincoln's Vice President.
- 1863** Maine native Joshua Chamberlain successfully defends Little Round Top against Confederate troops at the Battle of Gettysburg in the Civil War.
- 1866** Fire destroys much of downtown Portland in the area now known as the Old Port.
- 1888** Maine native Melville Fuller becomes the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 1931** Governor Percival Baxter begins buying land in northern Maine to establish a game reserve. Over the course of 30 years, Baxter purchases over 90,000 acres.
- 1948** Maine native Margaret Chase Smith is elected to the U.S. Senate, making her the first woman ever to be voted into this office.
- 1968** University of Maine system is established.
- 1974** James Longley is elected Governor of Maine, the first popularly elected independent governor in the history of the US.
- 1980** Maine native Edmund Muskie replaces Cyrus Vance as President Carter's Secretary of State. President Carter signs the Indian Land Claims agreement.

- 1984** Maine native Joan Benoit Samuelson becomes the first gold medal winner in the inaugural women's Olympic marathon event at the Summer Olympics.
- 1988** Maine native Senator George Mitchell is named the U.S. Senate Majority Leader.
- 1994** Maine resident Angus King becomes the second popularly elected independent governor in United States history.
- 1997** Maine native Senator William Cohen is sworn in as President Clinton's Secretary of Defense.

Author Sketch

Gary D. Schmidt was born in 1957 in Massapequa, New York. His father was a bank official; his mother, a teacher. Schmidt earned his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in English from the University of Illinois at Urbana, Champaign, completing his education in 1985.



Schmidt successfully combines two careers: English professor and writer. For his first career, Schmidt works as a professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For his second career, Schmidt began writing for grown-ups, but soon moved to writing biographies of children's writers. From there, he decided to try writing his own children's books. His fiction and nonfiction children's books span genres from young adult and middle grade novels to picture books.

Speaking of his dual careers, Schmidt commented: "Working at a college also means that I combine several levels of writing. Having finished one novel and begun work on another, I also want to try my hand at picture books. At the same time, I work on books that are slightly more arcane: a study of the medieval image of the mouth of hell and a biography of an eighteenth-century female historian. For me, these two very different kinds of writing (both creative, but one more scholarly than the other) help keep each project exciting rather than burdensome, even though there are the days when neither seems to have much energy."

"In thinking about my own work in children's literature, it seems to me that I am interested in showing the beatific and terrible complexities of our lives," Schmidt concluded.

Critic's Corner

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy was named a Newbery Medal Honor Book in 2005. In addition, it was named a Michael L. Printz Honor Book, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Children's Notable Book, and *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and a *Kirkus Review* Editors' Choice. Not surprisingly, reviews were laudatory.

Connie Tyrrell Burns, reviewing the novel for *School Library Journal*, is typical in her praise: "From the sad and shameful actual destruction of an island community in 1912, Schmidt weaves an evocative novel. . . . Although the story is hauntingly sad, there is much humor, too. Schmidt's writing is infused with feeling and rich in imagery. With fully developed, memorable characters and a fascinating, little-known piece of history, this novel will leave a powerful impression on readers."

Hazel Rochman, giving the novel a starred review in *Booklist*, noted: "The novel may be too long and detailed for some readers, with every plot strand and character accounted for. But the removal of the Malaga community really happened, and Schmidt weaves that history into a powerful tale of friendship and coming-of-age, adding a lyrical sense of the coastal landscape. Characters are drawn without reverence in this haunting combination of fact and fiction that has a powerful and tragic climax." The *Horn Book* critic said the novel: "examines the best and worst of humanity."

Other Books By Gary Schmidt

Writings for Children

John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1994)
Robert Frost (1994)
The Sin Eater (1996)
The Blessing of the Lord (1997)
William Bradford: Pilgrim of Answerable Courage (1997)
Anson's Way (1999)
William Bradford: Plymouth's Faithful Pilgrim (1999)
Saint Ciaran: The Tale of a Saint of Ireland (2000)
The Blackbirch Treasury of American Poetry (ed.) (2001)
Mara's Stories (2001)
Straw into Gold (2001)
The Wonders of Donal O'Donnell: A Folktale of Ireland (2002)
The Great Stone Face (2002)
First Boy (2005)

Writings for Adults

Supplementary Essays for College Writers (1988)
The Voice of the Narrator in Children's Literature: Insights from Writers and Critics, (ed.) (1989)
Robert McCloskey (1990)
Hugh Lofting (1992)
Sitting at the Feet of the Past: Retelling the North American Folktale for Children (ed.) (1992)
Communities of Discourse: The Rhetoric of Disciplines (ed.) (1993)
Katherine Paterson (1994)
The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century (1995)
Robert Lawson (1997)
Edging the Boundaries of Children's Literature (2001)
Summer: A Spiritual Biography of the Season (2005)
Spring: A Spiritual Biography of the Season (2006)

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Periodicals

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Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, May, 1994, p. 306; November, 1996, p. 114; May, 1999, Janice M. Del Negro, review of *Anson's Way*, pp. 327328.
Horn Book, July-August, 1990, p. 476.
Horn Book Guide, spring, 1997, p. 84; spring, 1998, Maeve Visser Knoth, review of *The Blessing of the Lord*, p. 96; fall, 1998, Tanya Auger, review of *William Bradford*, p. 416.
Kirkus Reviews, September 1, 1996, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 1328; June 1, 1998, review of *William Bradford*, p. 816.
New York Times Book Review, November 13, 1994, p. 30.
Publishers Weekly, December 19, 1994, review of *John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, pp. 5455; October 14, 1996, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 84; August 25, 1997, review of *The Blessing of the Lord*, p. 66; March 1, 1999, review of *Anson's Way*, p. 70; April 10, 2000, review of *Saint Ciaran*, p. 95.
School Library Journal, December, 1994, Kate Hegarty

Bouman, review of *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 130; February, 1995, p. 104; October, 1997, Patricia Pearl Dole, review of *The Blessing of the Lord*, p. 154; April, 1999, Starr E. Smith, review of *Anson's Way*, p. 12; June, 1999, Elaine Fort Weischedel, review of *William Bradford*, p. 153; August, 2000, Kathleen Kelly MacMillan, review of *Saint Ciaran*, p. 175; August, 2001, Ginny Gustin, review of *Straw into Gold*, p. 188.

Voice of Youth Advocates, August, 1994, p. 176; June, 1998, Kathleen Beck, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 103; August, 1999, Hilary Crew, review of *Anson's Way*, pp. 185-186.

General Objectives

1. To understand why the Buckminsters have come to live in Phippsburg
2. To probe life in a small town in Maine in the early 1900s
3. To probe the village elders' attitude toward blacks
4. To understand that the novel is based on a true incident
5. To trace the developing friendship between Lizzie and Turner
6. To probe the meaning of the novel's title
7. To analyze the symbolism in the novel
8. To recognize the novel's theme
9. To describe the novel's plot
10. To understand the novel's ending

Specific Objectives

1. To explore how Turner and his family are being judged by the villagers
2. To analyze the relationship between the blacks of Malaga Island and the village elders in Phippsburg
3. To analyze the village elders' motives for evicting the residents of Malaga Island
4. To analyze the history of Malaga Island
5. To understand and appreciate the difficulty of Reverend Buckminster's position
6. To understand the poor conditions in old-fashioned mental institutions
7. To explore the symbolism of baseball, violets, whales, and music in the novel
8. To compare and contrast Lizzie and Turner
9. To analyze why Mrs. Buckminster takes the Hurds into her home after they lose all their money
10. To determine what Turner learns from this experience and how he changes as a result of it

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Gary Schmidt's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Dialect: the way people speak in a certain region or area. In a dialect, certain words are spelled and pronounced differently. Schmidt uses dialect to describe his characters and setting more fully. We see this in Chapter 7, for example, when Lizzie says: "Turner Ernest Buckminster, you best be careful what you say." In Standard Written English, this sentence would read: "Turner Ernest Buckminster, you had better be careful what you say."

Figures of Speech: words and expressions not meant to be taken literally. Figures of speech (or figurative language) uses words in fresh, new ways to appeal to the imagination. Figures of speech include similes, metaphors, extended metaphors, hyperbole, and personification. What is impossible or difficult to convey to a reader through the literal use of language may be highly possible through the use of figures of speech. For instance, when taken literally, "my love is a rose" is ridiculous, for few people love a plant with a prickly, thorny stem. But "rose" suggests many other possible interpretations—delicate beauty, soft, rare, costly, etc.—and so it can be implied in a figurative sense to mean "love" or "loved one." Schmidt uses many figures of speech to convey his ideas. For example, in Chapter 7, he writes: "...if Turner had looked out his front door, he might have seen the maple just past the First Congregational shiver some and then coldly begin to burst into reds." This personification foreshadows the metaphorical conflagration that will engulf the town, as the village elders' plan explodes in their faces, resulting in tragedy for all.

Humor: parts of a story that are amusing. *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* is not a humorous book in the main, but it does have touches of humor nonetheless. For instance, in Chapter 9, Mrs. Cobb's dying words are ironically humorous. The elderly lady had been very worried that her last words would be recorded accurately and have gravity and solemnity. But right before she dies, Mrs. Cobb says: "Oh hell... It's warm here. Get me a ginger ale." Her words are so sacrilegious, of course, that Pastor Buckminster is forced to lie about them during the funeral service to preserve her good name.

The Importance of Setting

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy takes place in two settings: the town of Phippsburg, Maine; and Malaga Island, Maine. The year is 1912. Phippsburg is portrayed as a small town largely ruled by a group of village elders; Malaga Island is the more interesting focus and more significant to the novel.

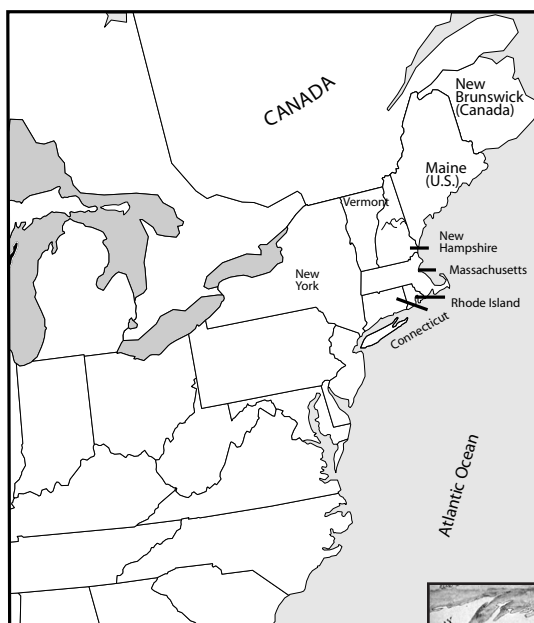
Malaga Island is part of the Isles of Shoals, a group of nine small islands situated approximately 10 miles off the east coast of the U.S., straddling the border of New Hampshire and Maine. First settled by Europeans in the early 1600s, the Isles of Shoals were an important fishing area for the early British and French colonies. Malaga Island was settled by Benjamin Darling and other Africans who had fled slavery around 1847. These early settlers kept their ancestral languages and lived in caves to avoid detection. As such, Malaga Island was typical of many island communities of the eastern Casco Bay. Fishermen stayed on the islands as squatters, living in shacks. Since they had virtually no contact with the mainland, the squatters were not counted in the census, seldom paid taxes, and rarely voted. Education, illness, and even death were taken care of at home. Most of the inhabitants of Malaga Island were direct descendants of Darling, including his sons Isaac and Benjamin, both of whom married women of the island and raised a total of fourteen children. Over time, other groups also settled on the island, including Irish, Scottish, and Portuguese people.

Families intermarried and worked together for the mutual benefit of the struggling community. However, as the island became a more desirable vacation destination, there was increasing pressure to seize the land and evict the residents.

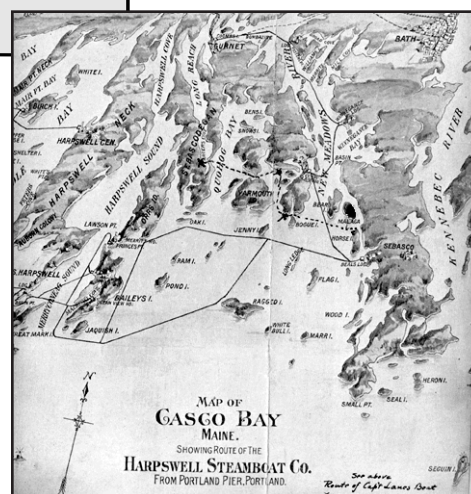
Land developers skillfully used the press to whip up public opposition to the colony. The newspapers portrayed the residents of the island as incompetent, slothful, and mentally ill. In 1912, the residents were served with a writ to vacate the island. Based merely on the authority of a

sole mainland doctor, families were sent to the Maine School for the Feeble-Minded. The state then destroyed all evidence that they existed, removing the shacks and exhuming the graves.

A January 1913 headline in a Maine newspaper read, "Cleaning up Malaga Island, No Longer a Reproach to the Good Name of the State" and noted: "Not only have the inhabitants of the island been raised to a standard of living they probably never dreamed of before and all done for them that is possible under the conditions, but the state has saved a nice little bundle of coin as well." Today, the only remaining monument to those former residents of the island is a row of white markers on a grassy hill near Pineland Center.



Historical Map of Casco Bay, Maine showing Malaga Island as a small black dot. View the map in its original context at: http://www.newenglandancestors.org/education/articles/research/special_topics/african_american/images_nehgs_malaga7_659_2100205.asp



Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Bryce Courtenay, *The Power of One*
Christopher Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*
Chris Crutcher, *Whale Talk*
Karen Hesse, *Witness*
Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*
Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*
Mildred Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, The Land, and The Gold Cadillac*
Theodore Taylor, *The Cay*
Linda Sue Park, *Project Mulberry*
Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Nonfiction

Lee Engfer, *Maine*
Russell Freedman, *The Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights*
Harry Smith, *ABCs of Maine*
Jane Smolik, *The Great State of Maine Activity Book*
Susan Whitehouse, *Maine-ly Fun: Great Things to Do with Kids in Maine*

Audio

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy

DVDs and Videos

Cider-House Rules
Crash
Rabbit-Proof Fence
Snow Falling on Cedars
To Kill a Mockingbird
To Sir, with Love

Internet

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Random House: Gary D. Schmidt
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SciFan: Writer: Gary D. Schmidt
www.scifan.com/writers/ss/SchmidtDGary.asp

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Gary Schmidt's *Lizzie Bright and Buckminster Boy* should include these aspects:

Themes

- baseball
- death
- friendship
- greed
- home
- maturity
- racism
- religion
- violence
- whales

Motifs

- moving to a new home and trying to adjust
- coping with being the new kid in town
- dealing with racism
- entertaining people by playing the organ
- expanding your mind by reading Charles Darwin and appreciating the effect that groundbreaking books can have on the world
- receiving a classical education
- losing your home through the machinations of greedy people
- disobeying your parents
- maturing and learning from your experiences
- feeling your father's pride in your accomplishments

Meaning Study

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

1. Maybe somewhere out West there really were Territories that he could light out to, where being a minister's son wouldn't matter worth a ... well, worth a darn. (Chapter 1, p.1)
(Although he has only been in the small Maine town of Phippsburg six hours, Turner Buckminster already hates it. The family moved there because Turner's father has taken a job as a minister in the town. Turner dreams of heading out West as Huck Finn had done. In a larger sense, this allusion to Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn signals the reader that the novel's main theme will concern racism and a black-

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy Gary Schmidt

white relationship. As with Jim in Huck Finn, Lizzie Bright is marginalized by society. As with Huck, Turner rejects the prevailing racism of his day to follow his heart and mind and treat Lizzie as an equal.)

2. "So, Turner Buckminster III," she asked, "when you look through the number at the end of your name, does it seem like you're looking through prison bars? (Chapter 1, p. 15)
(Deacon Hurd's mother realizes that Turner has great pressure on him to act with decorum because of his father's position in the community and his family reputation. He is automatically assumed to be an upright teenager because of his father. This contrasts to the black residents of Malaga Island, who are automatically assumed to be lazy squatters because of their family heritage as the descendants of slaves.)
3. "Sheriff Elwell, I believe she thought you might shoot her." "Wouldn't be any trouble, Mr. Hurd. One less colored in the world." (Chapter 2, p. 19)
(The town elders do not make any effort to conceal their racism: they detest the residents of Malaga Island, all blacks. The town elders also detest anyone who is different from them. This incident foreshadows the Sheriff's murder of Turner's father, who has revealed himself as "The Other" by sympathizing with the blacks of Malaga Island and by refusing to go along with the village elders' plans to evict them and destroy their homes.)
4. "Are you some kind of idiot?" (Chapter 3, p. 44)
(With this greeting, Lizzie makes friends with Turner. This touch of humor, as with Schmidt's other deft humorous bits, enlivens the book and helps him relieve the horror of the village elders' actions.)
5. "Turner," he said, "books can be fire, you know." (Chapter 8, p. 129)
(Turner is astonished when his father, a staid and traditional minister, gives him a copy of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species to read. This is our first hint that the Reverend Buckminster is not what he appears to be: he follows the rules for the sake of his career, but he also thinks for himself. He is open to new ideas, too, even if they conflict with what others think. This incident foreshadows the Reverend's break with the town, his rejection of racism, and his decision to back his son's wish to give the house he inherits to Lizzie. This scene also shows one of Schmidt's primary themes: the power of literature to change the world by educating people.)
6. And so the ball came down, down, spinning, spinning, and Turner gripped his bat, brought his front leg in...and then stepped back from the plate just as the ball dropped, smacked the granite, leaped

up, and then rolled to his feet. (Chapter 8, p. 140)
(Turner deliberately strikes out to assert his independence. This is his signal that he intends to think for himself and do what he believes is right. He refuses to be bullied by the townspeople or his father.)

7. "Oh hell," said Mrs. Cobb, "it's warm here. Get me a ginger ale." (Chapter 9, p. 151)
(Mrs. Cobb had made Turner promise to record her final words, assuming that she would say something profound and holy. As this humorous scene shows, she does not. It suggests that we cannot plan as much as we would like to, that some events are out of our control, which foreshadows Lizzie's death.)
8. He looked at Reverend Buckminster, expecting the disappointment he knew his father must feel. But his father's eyes were upon him, and they were not disappointed. (Chapter 10, p. 170)
(Before his death, the Reverend redeems himself by revealing that he rejects racism and takes pride in his son's rejection of racism. His father's approval is a key element in Turner's maturation.)
9. "Because," said the matron, "Elizabeth Bright Griffin died ten days after coming to this institution." (Chapter 11, p. 201)
(Turner is crushed to discover that Lizzie has already died, her spirit crushed by her imprisonment in a mental hospital. Her death gives the book an emotional resonance and tragic dimension.)
10. Turner knew that everything in the world rejoices in the touch, and everything in the world laments in the losing. (Chapter 12, p. 216)
(In the novel's climax, Turner realizes what he has lost—his father, Lizzie, Malaga—and what he has gained—an understanding of the importance of human contact and communication, even if it must be fleeting. This is the novel's theme.)

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. When and where does the story take place?
(The story takes place in the town of Phippsburg, Maine, and Malaga Island, Maine, in 1912.)

- Why do the village elders want to get rid of the residents of Malaga Island?
(They are prejudiced against them, but even more important, the village elders want to seize the island and develop it into a tourist destination. To do so, they have to get rid of the residents.)
- What book does the Reverend Buckminster give Turner to open his mind?
(Reverend Buckminster gives Turner Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species.)
- To whom does Mrs. Cobb leave her home?
(She leaves it to Turner, to everyone's astonishment.)
- What happens to Lizzie at the end of the novel?
(She dies in the Asylum for the Feeble-Minded, where the village elders have imprisoned her to make it easier for them to keep her out of Mrs. Cobb's house, which Turner wants to give to her.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

- Why does Turner deliberately strike out during the second baseball game?
(Turner is asserting his independence and ability to think for himself. He refuses to go along with the elders' plan to bring him into line with their racism.)
- What do whales symbolize?
(They symbolize human understanding and contact, our essential humanity. They also stand for the human condition, the loss as well as the joy that we all face.)
- How does Turner change by the end of the novel?
(As with Twain's Huck Finn, Turner has learned to think for himself. He rejects society's mores, specifically hatred and racism, because they conflict with his conscience.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

- Why do you think this novel was named a Newbery Honor book?
(The novel's humanity, realistic and multi-faceted characters, careful and logical plotting, enduring themes, and high-quality writing mark it as an potential classic that deserves such high recognition.)
- Did you find the novel's ending believable? Why or why not?
(The ending may seem too pat to many readers, with the "good" characters— Turner and his mother—coming out ahead and the "bad" characters— the Hurds and the Stonecrops— going bankrupt.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

- Make a model of the Malaga Island community as it is described in the novel.
- Working with a partner, role-play a dialogue between Lizzie and Turner, in which they discuss their feelings about the house that Mrs. Cobb has left to Turner.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

- Construct a three-dimensional model of the village of Phippsburg, Maine. Use details from the novel to guide you.
- The village elders want to make Malaga Island a tourist destination. Suppose that their plans had succeeded. Make a travel brochure for the resort they built.
- Draw a new cover for the novel. Be sure that it entices people to read the book.
- Choose background music for an especially dramatic scene. Read the scene to a group of classmates as you play the music in the background.
- Find out the top songs in America in 1912. Make a list to share with the class of the Top Ten songs. Then choose one of the songs and play it for a small group of friends. How is it similar to the music you listen to today? How is it different?

Language Arts

- In an essay, analyze how Lizzie Bright's name does or does not fit her character. What other names in the novel are symbolic? Include at least two other names in your discussion.
- The phrase "light out for the territories" comes from Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Read the novel and relate it to *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* to explain what the phrase means in relationship to both books.
- Mrs. Cobb wants Turner to write down her last words. Choose any six characters from the novel and write down what you suppose their last words will be. Make their last words mirror their character.
- Find the last words from any three famous writers. Write them on strips of paper to display on the bulletin board.

5. Write the novel's back story: what was life like for Turner and his family in Boston? How did they come to live in Phippsburg, Maine?
6. Imagine that you are Lizzie. Write three journal entries: the first when you meet Turner, the second when you realize that you will lose your home, and the last when you are taken to the mental institution. Explain your feelings about your life and experiences.

History/Social Studies

1. Gary Schmidt explains in the Author's Note that while *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* is a novel, it is based on true events. Research the history of the Malaga community. How accurately does Schmidt describe it in the novel?
2. The Reverend mentions the Quakers. In a report, trace the history of the Quakers and explain what they believe.
3. Make timeline showing the modern history of the civil rights movement in America. Begin your timeline around 1940 and continue it to the present.
4. Explain how Darwin's *Origin of Species* changed the way we think about diversity, survival, and the beginnings of life on earth.
5. Make a FAQ page for Maine. Include at least ten commonly asked questions and answers about the state.

Speech/Drama

1. Preacher Griffin undergoes what Lizzie calls "The Change," becoming a distinguished, even frightening preacher. Model "The Change" with your voice and body language.
2. In a group, debate whether or not the novel's ending is realistic. Provide specific examples to make your point.
3. Working with some friends, retell this story as a legend. Make your retelling dramatic and suspenseful.
4. With a partner, act out a scene between Lizzie and Turner in which they discuss what they like best about Malaga Island.
5. Schmidt uses dialect to describe his characters and setting more fully. Using the dialect of you

and your friends, create a dialogue between Turner and Willis in which they talk about working on the lobster boat and doing chores in the village.

Science/Math

1. Lizzie and Turner go clamming. Make a poster showing the different parts of a clam.
2. Report on whales. Do they act the way that Turner describes in the novel? How intelligent are they? Where are they found? How are they protected?
3. People who get in the way of the village elders' plans for tourism are placed in the mental hospital. Explain contemporary treatments for mental illness.
4. Some of the characters in the novel go bankrupt. Explain how the new bankruptcy law works. How would someone declare bankruptcy today?
5. Create a chart showing the divisions among people who identify themselves as Christians. What percentage of people are Congregationalists, the religion of the Reverend Buckminster, his family, and his flock?

Alternate Assessment

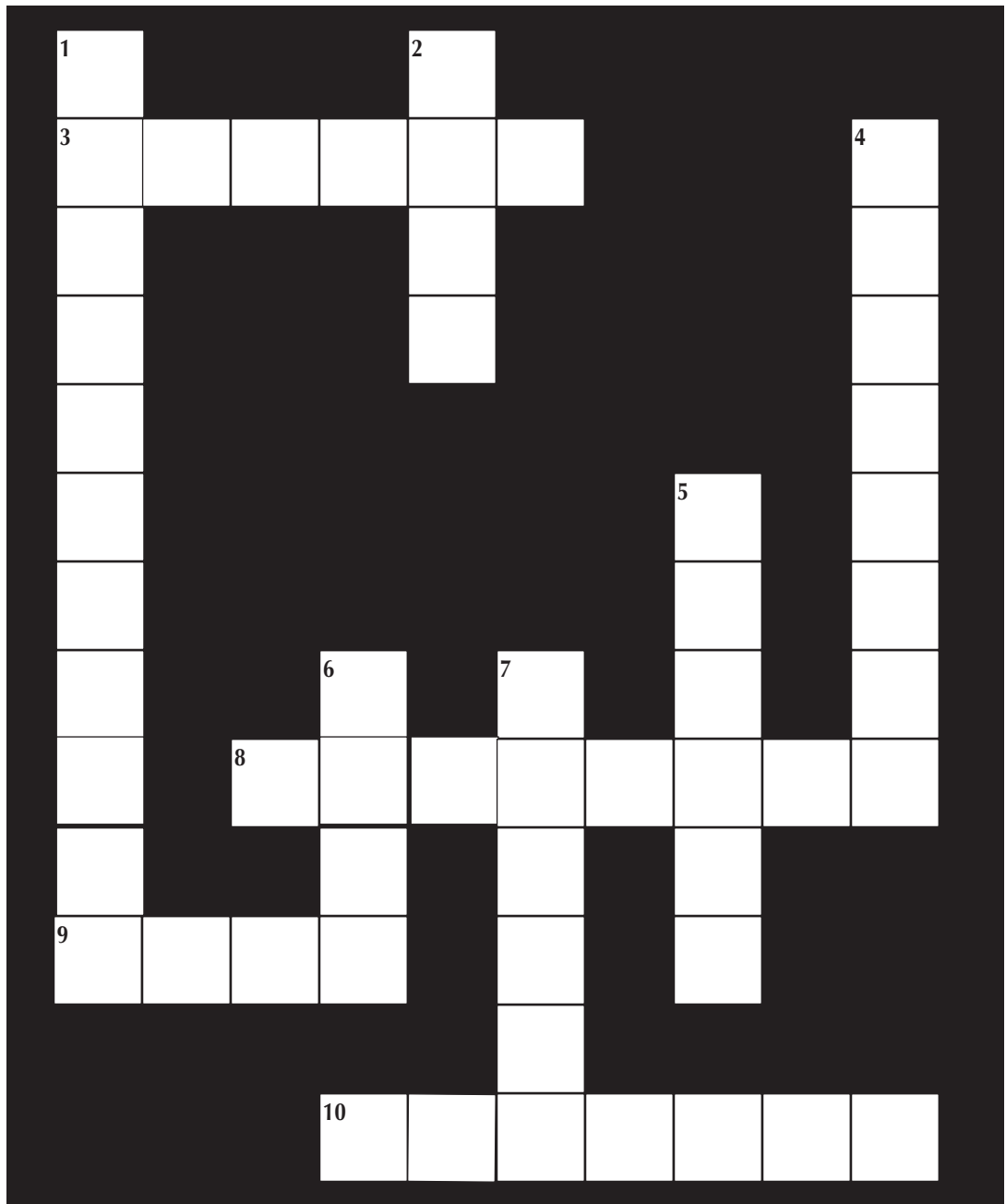
1. Write and deliver a eulogy for Reverend Buckminster.
2. Lizzie suffers from a concussion. Explain some of the causes of this condition, its treatment, and its potential dangers.
3. Draw or paint a mural showing the main events in the plot
4. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.
5. Turner's father gives him Darwin's *Origin of Species* to read, saying that the right book can ignite a fire in your mind. Find another book that causes a similar change in the way that people think. Read the book and share what you learned with a small group of classmates.

Vocabulary

Complete the following crossword puzzle with these words and clues from *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*.

calamity, daft, forlorn, frailty, impertinent, malice, morbid, pauper, taut, vile

- | Across | Down |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 3. obsessed with death | 1. rude, fresh |
| 8. disaster | 2. loathsome |
| 9. tight | 4. weakness |
| 10. lonesome and sad | 5. evil |
| | 6. not sane |
| | 7. poor person |



Comprehension Test A

Part I: 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 blanks provided.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| A. Lizzie Bright | F. Phippsburg |
| B. Turner Buckminster | G. Sheriff Elwell |
| C. Willis Hurd | H. Reverend Griffin |
| D. Mr. Stonecrop | I. Boston |
| E. Malaga Island | J. Mrs. Cobb |

- ___ 1. man who deserts Phippsburg when his shipyards fail
- ___ 2. man who pushes Reverend Buckminster over the granite cliff
- ___ 3. woman who leaves Turner her house in her will
- ___ 4. Lizzie's grandfather, a courageous preacher
- ___ 5. Turner Buckminster's new home
- ___ 6. teenage boy who becomes friends with Lizzie
- ___ 7. Lizzie's home
- ___ 8. African-American child who knows all about clams and the Maine coast
- ___ 9. Turner's former home
- ___ 10. boy who becomes Turner's close friend and works with Turner on the lobster boat

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

- ___ 1. The novel opens in 1952 when Turner's father takes a job as the town's new minister.
- ___ 2. The first night in town, Turner plays in a town baseball game. He strikes out.
- ___ 3. The community elders want to drive the blacks from their home, an impoverished community settled by freed or possibly escaped slaves.
- ___ 4. As punishment for a minor infraction (walking down the street shirtless), Turner's father makes the boy visit elderly Mrs. Hurd and play Scrabble with her.
- ___ 5. From the very start of the novel, Turner's father supports him and backs him in all his activities, no matter how the rest of the town reacts.
- ___ 6. One day Lizzie falls on the rocks and suffers a concussion.
- ___ 7. Mr. Hurd sends his mother to the Home for the Feeble-Minded in Pownal because he wants to sell her fine house to finance the beginning of his real estate plans.
- ___ 8. Turner enjoys going to the village school and reading Greek and Latin books.
- ___ 9. Turner's father gives him Darwin's *Origin of Species* to read.
- ___ 10. Deacon Hurd suffers a financial downturn; the Buckminsters buy his small boat.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the novel.

1. "Oh, yes," said Mrs. Hurd, her hand still on his cheek, "I do, too. Just light out for the Territories."
2. "More to the point," said the tallest of the group—the one with the most expensive frock coat, the most expensive top hat, and the most expensive shiny shoes—"one less colored on Malaga Island."
3. "Turner," he said, "books can be fire, you know."
4. "Because," said the matron, "Elizabeth Bright Griffin died ten days after coming to this institution."
5. Turner knew that everything in the world rejoices in the touch, and everything in the world laments in the losing.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Who is the main character in the novel— Lizzie or Turner? Support your conclusion with specific details from the novel.
2. Provide three details from the novel that make *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* seem to be nonfiction, even though it is really fiction.
3. Explain the meaning of at least three of the following symbols from the novel: music, violets, whales, eyes, and baseball.
4. What function do the Hurds serve in the novel?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Choose the word or phrase that best completes each of the following statements.

1. The novel opens in **(1912, 1992)** when Turner Buckminster, his father, and his mother arrive in Phippsburg, Maine, from Boston because his father has taken a job as the town's new minister.
2. Turner Buckminster is **(thirteen, eighteen)** years old when the novel opens.
3. The first night in town, Turner plays in a town **(football, baseball)** game and does not do well at all.
4. As punishment for a minor infraction, Turner's father makes Turner visit an elderly woman and **(read to her, clean her yard)** for weeks.
5. One day Lizzie falls on the rocks and **(breaks her leg, suffers a concussion)**.
6. Mr. Hurd sends his mother to the Home for the Feeble-Minded in Pownal because he **(wants her house to finance his real estate plans, realizes that she is mentally ill and cannot live independently)**.
7. Turner's father gives him a copy of **(Origin of Species, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)** to read, saying that the right book can ignite a fire in your mind.
8. The Reverend Buckminster dies from a **(tumor, fall)**.
9. **(Reverend Griffin, Mr. Stonecrop)** tries to buy the Buckminsters' house, but Turner refuses to sell.
10. At the end of the novel, Willis and Turner garden and work on a **(cruise ship, lobster boat)**.

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. Newton family | A. boy who is home-schooled in Greek and Latin |
| ___ 2. Phippsburg | B. family Turner wants to give his house to |
| ___ 3. Lizzie Bright | C. place where Turner's father gets a job as a minister |
| ___ 4. Turner Buckminster | D. Lizzie's grandfather |
| ___ 5. Reverend Griffin | E. place that represents freedom to Turner |
| ___ 6. Eason family | F. girl who dies in the Home for the Feeble-Minded |
| ___ 7. Boston | G. place where Turner and his family came from |
| ___ 8. Malaga Island | H. woman whose last words concern ginger ale |
| ___ 9. Mrs. Cobb | I. home to former slaves |
| ___ 10. Territories | J. kindly family that stands up for Turner and his family |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the story.

1. baseball
2. violets
3. whales
4. eyes
5. "the Change"

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What makes Turner such an admirable character? Isolate and analyze at least three of his best traits.
2. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and resolution.
3. Compare and contrast Turner's father and Lizzie's grandfather. How are they the same and different?
4. What role does the novel's setting play in the story? Why is the setting so important in this novel?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 3. morbid | 1. impertinent |
| 8. calamity | 2. vile |
| 9. taut | 4. frailty |
| 10. forlorn | 5. malice |
| | 6. daft |
| | 7. pauper |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

- Mrs. Hurd is one of the few who openly yearns for freedom as Turner does. As with Turner, she dreams of heading out West as Huck Finn had done. In a larger sense, this allusion to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* signals the reader that the novel's main theme will concern racism and a black-white relationship. As with Jim in *Huck Finn*, Lizzie Bright is marginalized by society. As with Huck, Turner and Mrs. Hurd reject the prevailing racism of their day to follow their heart and mind and treat everyone as an equal. This works for Turner, but costs Mrs. Hurd her freedom.
- The town elders do not make any effort to conceal their racism: they detest the residents of Malaga Island, all blacks, and anyone who is different from them. This incident foreshadows the sheriff's murder of Turner's father, who has revealed himself as "The Other" by sympathizing with the blacks of Malaga Island and by refusing to go along with the village elders' plans to evict them and destroy their homes.
- Turner is astonished when his father, a staid and traditional minister, gives him a copy of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* to read. This is our first hint that the Reverend Buckminster is not what he

appears to be: he follows the rules for the sake of his career, but he also thinks for himself. He is open to new ideas, too, even if they conflict with what others think. This incident foreshadows the Reverend's break with the town, rejection of racism, and decision to back his son's wish to give the house he inherits to Lizzie. This scene also shows one of Schmidt's primary themes: the power of literature to change the world by educating people.

- Turner is shattered to discover that Lizzie has already died, her spirit crushed by her imprisonment in a mental hospital. Her death gives the book an emotional resonance and tragic dimension.
- In the novel's climax, Turner realizes what he has lost—his father, Lizzie, Malaga—and what he has gained—an understanding of the importance of human contact and communication, even if it must be fleeting. This is the novel's theme.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. 1912 | 6. wants her house to finance his real estate plans |
| 2. thirteen | 7. <i>Origin of Species</i> |
| 3. baseball | 8. fall |
| 4. read to her | 9. Mr. Stonecrop |
| 5. suffers a concussion | 10. lobster boat |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

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

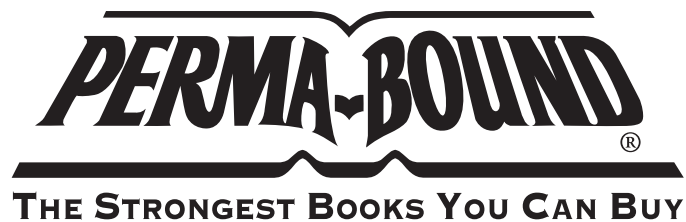
Part III: Identification (20 points)

- Baseball is a traditional American sport. As such, it's often the way that new kids become part of the group. Turner was a fine baseball player in Boston, but in Phippsburg, he can't adjust to Willis' sneaky pitching. Although Willis proves to be a good kid, his pitching and Turner's inability to hit off it foreshadows the town's sneakiness and Turner's difficulty in adjusting to their underhanded dealings.
- Violets represent death: Lizzie teaches Turner to plant them on graves.

3. Whales symbolize human understanding and contact, our essential humanity. They also stand for the human condition, the loss as well as the joy that we all face.
4. Eyes represent communication, looking into someone's soul and connecting with him or her. Turner does this with his father's last look.
5. "The Change" is how the Reverend Griffin, Lizzie's grandfather, goes from a genial man to a charismatic, vibrant, and persuasive speaker.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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