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SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1: At 5:00 A. M. October 1935, in a hollow on Crooked Ridge at the confluence of Black River and Slag Creek, near Coal Station, Virginia, Gypsy Leemaster's Aunt Belle Prater vanished, wearing only a thin nightgown. Her husband, Uncle Everett Prater, a coal miner, went out a half hour later, but found no trace. The loss grieves Gypsy's mother, Love Ball Dotson, a speech and drama teacher at the local high school, and her parents, Granny and Grandpa Ball. Six months later, after Everett turns to drink, Woodrow comes to live with Gypsy's grandparents at a time when she is having nightmares about a dead animal. Woodrow, who is cross-eyed and poorly dressed, is a worthy friend for Gypsy, who immediately questions him about Belle. He treasures a clue—a poem by Jalal al-Din Rumi about secrets at dawn in a place where two worlds touch.

Chapter 2: Granny prepares a cake for Porter Dotson's birthday party and chastises Gypsy for disdainning her stepfather. Granny explains why she named her daughter Belle, in hopes that she would grow into a beauty. In reality, Belle was much plainer than her sister Love, who was away at college in Radford. When Amos Leemaster arrived in town in January to open a hardware store, Belle was his girl until Love appeared and outshone her.

Chapter 3: When Grandpa and Woodrow arrive home from town, Woodrow is jubilant at purchases of comic books and clothes. Gypsy accompanies him to Clint Akers's barber-shop to get a haircut. Clint pries into the family tragedy and comments on Amos's fondness for Gypsy. She realizes that Woodrow prizes her for herself.

Chapter 4: Granny reminds Gypsy of her scheduled piano practice and hair care before the party. Woodrow remembers how much his mother wanted to play the piano. At the party, Doc Dot, Porter's brother, pours the blackberry wine. Woodrow tells about his mother's difficult birth and about her drifting out of her body and greeting Woodrow's spirit. The birthday party is so special that he wishes to live it over again. He wonders why his mother ever left home to marry Everett.

Chapter 5: An hour later, Love is rolling Gypsy's hair when Gypsy asks about Amos's interest in Belle. Love is sorry that she caused Belle pain by taking Amos from her. To counter heartache, Belle dressed in red on the miners' payday and left home to find a new beau. She ran off with Everett, married him a week later, then came home two weeks afterward to get her clothes while everyone was in church. Gypsy suggests that Belle's disappearance is another example of desperation. Near dawn, Gypsy has a dream of an animal in a pool of blood, but represses the identity of its face.

Chapter 6: The next day, Woodrow teases Mrs. Comp-

ton, the Sunday school teacher, with a tall tale about Buck Coleman and his tapeworm. At worship service, the principal's wife, Mrs. Cooper, insults Woodrow's looks. In the tree house after lunch, Woodrow says that his greatest wish is to have uncrossed eyes; Gypsy wants short hair. Woodrow confides that his mother wanted most to escape her life. He promises to meet Gypsy at the tree house an hour later.

Chapter 7: At their next meeting, Woodrow tells about Belle's favorite spot—a strange place where two worlds meet. The sounds of Blind Benny interrupt the story. Woodrow divulges that his mother tries to contact him. On the way back to bed, Gypsy passes Porter, who is smoking in the moonlight. In the night, Benny sings "On the Wings of a Snow-White Dove," which dispels Gypsy's bad dream.

Chapter 8: On Monday morning, Woodrow enters Miss Hart's 6-B class and tells a story about Floyd Collins, who explored Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, and makes up a math puzzle and a word game. His ambition is to make movies.

Chapter 9: On Friday, Grandpa, Woodrow, and Gypsy are watching television when Everett arrives. As he departs, Woodrow grows quiet because he sees a blonde in his father's car.

Chapter 10: On a rainy Saturday, Love suggests that Porter escort Gypsy and Woodrow to see "Rear Window" at the theater. Gypsy sulks at having to spend time with Porter. The ticket seller remembers Belle and Love. The scary movie terrifies Gypsy. Porter calls for Doc Dot. That night, Gypsy awakens with measles. She must stay in bed until September and spend ten days in the dark. Doc thinks her recurrent nightmare is about her father and orders hot rum to help her sleep.

Chapter 11: The next night, Woodrow brings Blind Benny to the window. He recalls growing up with Amos in Cold Valley, Kentucky, and remembers that Amos called his daughter Beauty. Benny sings "When the Moon Comes over the Mountain." Porter cools Gypsy's room with a fan and brings a radio. She recalls abandoning the tree house after Amos's death and returning when her mother and stepfather went to Myrtle Beach on their honeymoon. Gypsy wishes Love had not married Porter. The next Saturday, Gypsy is well enough to plan a wienie roast with Woodrow and to make a guest list of their friends.

Chapter 12: On Saturday at the end of June, Woodrow tells a ghost tale at the wienie roast about Aunt Millie's premature burial and the theft of her ring. Buzz Osborne makes rude remarks about crossed eyes. Gypsy realizes that Buzz is jealous of Woodrow's scary story.

Chapter 13: The next morning, Gypsy asks Grandpa why looks are so important. She comments on how much trouble her hair causes her. Grandpa confides that Amos wanted Gypsy to have long hair. He remarks that she plays piano like her aunt Belle. He and Granny visited Belle and Everett, but Belle disliked their visits. To Gypsy's question about whether

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Everett had anything to do with Belle's disappearance, Woodrow intrudes and denies that his father was involved.

Chapter 14: While Woodrow cuts out personal ads, Gypsy apologizes for the insinuation about Everett. Woodrow recalls reading ads and comics and working the crossword puzzle with Belle. Gypsy realizes that he is looking for a message from his mother.

Chapter 15: In the second week of July, Love prepares for her annual garden party, featuring the area's debutantes. Woodrow and Gypsy serve refreshments. Mrs. Cooper continues insulting and needling Woodrow about Belle because Belle once called her a cow. Woodrow implies that he puts rum in Mrs. Cooper's peach ice and encourages her and the debs to wade in the creek.

Chapter 16: Doc Dot checks out Woodrow's story about the suggestion of rum. In August, Woodrow confides that he and Belle were saving for an operation to correct his crossed eyes. After Gypsy asks what happened to the money, Woodrow gets angry. When Rita and Garnet drop by, Woodrow tells a chilling tale about a woman with long hair. Gypsy is insulted and claims she can be just as naughty as Woodrow. Porter asks why she wants to be bad. Gypsy replies that she's tired of being somebody's good little girl. Porter believes she is like Belle, who is trying to find herself.

Chapter 17: On the last Saturday of August, after Gypsy and Love shop for clothes in Bristol, Gypsy notes that the nightmare returns more often. When she and Woodrow advance to seventh grade after Labor Day, Mr. Collins, their English teacher, asks about their families. Buzz insists that Woodrow tell about Belle. Woodrow makes up a whimsical tale about a recipe for invisibility. Gypsy begins telling about herself and her father, a fireman who she claims died while saving a baby from a burning house. Against Woodrow's objections, Buzz claims that Amos shot himself in the face. Gypsy realizes that the ugly thing in her dream is revealed.

Chapter 18: Woodrow beats Buzz. Gypsy wobbles home in the throes of recovered memories of seeing her father's suicide in autumn 1946. She reviles her dead father as she cuts her hair. Porter arrives and asks how she feels. He believes she is emotionally wounded and leaves her alone to cry away the hurt.

Chapter 19: Porter defends Gypsy's rash action. Gypsy discusses Amos's suicide with Love and claims that her hair felt like a veil over the real Gypsy. Love recalls that Belle felt the same invisibility. Woodrow is confined to his room for two weeks for fighting. That evening, Porter escorts Gypsy to Clint's barbershop for a private trim. Clint names the style the "Dixie Pixie." Gypsy dreads being laughed at for her impulsiveness.

Chapter 20: Woodrow walks with her the next morning and puts together the clues that Gypsy was coming to grips with Amos's suicide. They are glad that Woodrow whipped Buzz. Gypsy informs Mary Lee about the haircut, which must be done by a real barber. Peggy Sue is also interested in the haircut. By Friday, six or seven girls have shorter hair.

Chapter 21: That night, Woodrow and Gypsy accompany Benny on his rounds. He tells of being the local sin eater until Amos rescued him from superstition and gave him a room over the hardware store. Benny collects clothing, food, and tobacco left for him on people's porches. He tells a death joke and sings "Nobody's Darling" and "Red River Valley." He misses Amos, and takes Woodrow and Gypsy for friends.

They return home at 2:00 A. M. Gypsy kisses Benny and wishes she could live the day over again.

Chapter 22: At Granny's birthday party in September, Woodrow exalts Blind Benny in his English paper. The family applauds. Porter salutes Mother Ball and proposes that Gypsy give a piano recital. Love sets the date on her thirteenth birthday. Doc plans to take Woodrow to a specialist in Baltimore to straighten his eyes.

Chapter 23: On October 11, 1954, Woodrow awakens Gypsy at 4:45 A. M. He reveals that Belle took Woodrow's pants and shirt before leaving and probably hitchhiked to the carnival at Grassy Lick. The cousins realize that their parents left because their pain was bigger than their love for their children. Woodrow promises to tell Granny and the rest of the family what he knows about Belle's disappearance.

TIME LINE OF THE ACTION

1941 November Gypsy is born.

1942 Jan. 1 Woodrow is born.

1947 Amos builds a tree house for Gypsy.
autumn Love sells the store, but insists that Benny keep his room.

Gypsy begins taking piano lessons from Granny.

1949 Amos gives Blind Benny a room over the hardware store.

1953 Dwight D. Eisenhower is president.

Porter Dotson marries Love Ball Leemaster.

1952 November Gypsy sees Woodrow in hillbilly hand-me-down clothes.

1953 Oct. 11 Belle Prater leaves home.

1954 May Woodrow comes to live with his grandparents.

end of June At the wienie roast, Buzz Osborne makes rude remarks about crossed eyes. Gypsy realizes that Buzz is jealous of Woodrow's scary story.

second week of July At Love's annual garden party, Woodrow encourages Mrs. Cooper and the debs to wade in the creek.

last Saturday in August Gypsy and Love shop in Bristol, Tennessee.

first days of school Buzz reveals to the class how Amos shot himself. Gypsy returns home and cuts her hair to spite her dead father. Porter stays near as she cries.

That evening Porter takes Gypsy to the barbershop for a "Dixie pixie."

Friday Six or seven girls have their hair cut like Gypsy's.

that night Woodrow and Gypsy accompany Benny on his rounds. He misses Amos, and takes Woodrow and Gypsy for friends.

Saturday Gypsy kisses Benny and wishes she could live the day over again.

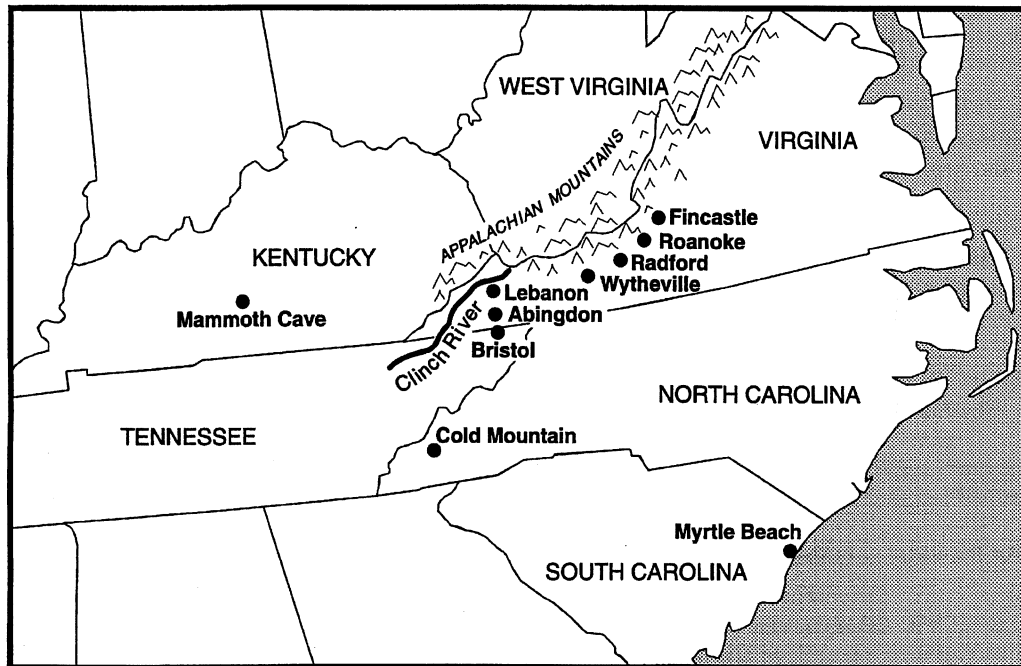
late September At Granny's birthday party in September, Woodrow exalts Blind Benny in his English paper. Porter proposes that Gypsy give a piano recital. Doc plans to take Woodrow to a specialist in Baltimore to straighten his eyes.

Oct. 11 Woodrow and Gypsy realize that their parents left because their pain was too much to bear.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruth Carol White's personal experiences undergird her fiction accounts of the Appalachian lifestyle. Born to a mining

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family in a coal camp near Whitewood, Virginia, she grew up among fundamentalist mountain folk in the 1940s and 1950s. Like many writers, she valued a mother who read to her family. White's favorite, *A Way Through the Wood*, helped her envision her role as the fourth girl born to a father who wanted only one boy. At age six, she suffered the loss of her father, who was murdered in a senseless fight about a flat tire. The fatherless family resettled in a tarpaper shack near Grundy while White's mother struggled to raise vegetables and survive on social security benefits.

Compensating for devaluation and loss, White determined to rescue herself from feelings of worthlessness. By age 8, she began composing her own dramas and invited friends to act them out. Two years later, her family faced an ongoing trauma after Ruth's sister Audrey was raped. Charges against the attacker brought no redress. The family was left with public shame, Audrey's illegitimate son, and her subsequent depression and schizophrenia. The family moved to Flint, Michigan, where Ruth's mother found little truth to get-rich-quick stories of ample work in the auto industry. While caring for her troubled family, she worked in a hospital kitchen. As an escape, her two older daughters married in their mid-teens.

White was unhappy in Michigan, where Northerners ridiculed her hillbilly accent and unfashionable clothes. She returned to Grundy to live with her father's sister and poured herself into reading, writing, singing in talent shows, and playing clarinet with the marching band. Her hopes for a music career ended with chronic laryngitis and the end of the school band program. Encouragement from Mrs. McMahon, a senior English teacher, pointed her toward literature and helped her acquire a Junior Woman's Club scholarship to Montreat-Anderson Junior College, where she studied Bible and religion.

After marrying and earning a B.A. in English and library science from Pfeiffer College, White served public schools in the Carolinas and Georgia as teacher and librarian. Her marriage produced a daughter, Dee Olivia, but failed to satisfy White's needs, which derived from being the self-defeating child of an alcoholic. After divorcing her husband, she moved to Charlotte, then South Carolina and Albany, Georgia. During the worst of her depression, she began walking more, mentally composing fiction, and ridding herself of dependence on food, cigarettes, and wine. After settling in Virginia Beach, she developed a career in technical services as librarian for the Association for Research and Enlightenment.

CRITIC'S CORNER

A satisfying feel-good novel, *Belle Prater's Boy*, a 1997 Newbery honor book, offers young readers more plot and thematic content than they are usually offered in coming-of-age fiction. In the story, the two protagonists cope with human flaws in their absent parents, whose departure left them traumatized and hurting. The resulting bond enhances their discovery of self-confidence and identity in a community that often gossips and judges on surface detail rather than substance. Ruth White's sensitive study of contrasting emotional conflict in a pair of 12-year-old Appalachian cousins won a 1997 Boston *Globe-Horn* Book Honor Award, NCSS-CBC Notable Book for Social Studies, New York Public Library 100 Best Titles, Pennsylvania School Librarians Association Best Fiction, *Parenting* Magazine Reading Award, *Publishers Weekly* Best Book, California Young Reader Medal, Illinois Rebecca Caudill Young Reader Award, Maine Student Book Award, Nebraska Golden Sower Young Adult Award, Missouri Mark Twain Award, Oklahoma Sequoyah Children's Book and Young Adult Awards, Pacific Northwest Young Readers Choice Award, Vermont Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, ALA Best of the Best

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for Young Adults and Notable Children's Book, IRA Teacher's Choice and Notable Book for a Global Society, *School Library Journal's* Best Book for 1996, and immediate attention by classroom readers, teachers, and librarians.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To define coming to knowledge
2. To describe the physical, mental, and emotional effects of loss
3. To pinpoint examples of unfinished family business
4. To characterize family dynamics at gatherings and private one-on-one conversations
5. To list ways in which acceptance restores emotional balance
6. To account for private misgivings
7. To question inappropriate hopes for "happily after after" endings
8. To assess the harm suicide does to an immature mind
9. To isolate moments of disillusion, innocence, illness, and fatigue
10. To account for the value of humor as a source of social interaction

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To characterize Woodrow's ambitions and skills
2. To compare Porter, Love, Mr. Collins, and other adults as peacemakers
3. To characterize the relationship between Amos and Blind Benny
4. To comprehend the pressures that force Gypsy to accept the truth
5. To list reasons that Woodrow delights in his new home
6. To explain how measles helps Gypsy to take stock of her family situation
7. To account for the names Gypsy Arbutus, Beauty, and Belle
8. To contrast various occasions in which Gypsy goes to the tree house
9. To analyze the importance of Blind Benny in helping Gypsy understand Amos
10. To characterize gatherings at which the Ball family celebrates birthdays

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Ruth White's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

bildungsroman literally a "formation novel," which describes the coming-of-age of an untried or naive youth. The story of Woodrow's new home illustrates how two pre-teen cousins share personal strengths and cope with each other's faults. For example, Woodrow lacks Gypsy's social graces, but accommodates the rough moments at gatherings with other youth by telling outrageous stories. When a class discussion puts Gypsy on the spot, it is Woodrow who strikes out with his fists at Buzz Osborne, the snide bully who attempts to humiliate her with facts about Amos's suicide. Woodrow and Gypsy's childish withdrawals into the tree house serve both of the cousins with opportunities to discuss their mutual misgivings about missing parents and to understand better the forces that drive Woodrow and Gypsy to odd behavior, such as cutting up the classified ads from the Sun-

day paper, rejecting a stepfather, growing silent at the sight of a father with another woman, and chopping off long curls.

irony an implied discrepancy between what is said or done and what is meant. Chief among ironies regarding Gypsy are her efforts to shut Porter out of her life and the number of times she must acknowledge his skillful parenting and his genuine regard for her welfare, as with his aid at the movie when Gypsy gets hysterical and his gifts of radio and fan to her sickroom. Another irony is Gypsy's attempt to compensate for Woodrow's shortcomings and his gifts of reassurance, trust, understanding, and the camaraderie of Blind Benny and his pack of dogs. From Benny, the least acceptable person in the community, Gypsy learns to value her father as a compassionate friend and community leader who formed a civic league to help the poor and who offered an unfortunate a chance to redeem himself from sin eater to dignified human being.

tall tale a humorously outlandish or exaggerated tale of improbable or superhuman incidents, a genre that thrives in evening ghost story sessions, narrative poetry, folk songs, and hillbilly tales. Woodrow, a skillful teller, uses the tall tale in Sunday school and class and at a wienie roast as a means of introducing his fine-tuned sense of humor to the community. His vision of the place where worlds meet ultimately gives way to a realistic view of his mother, who leaves one wretched personal milieu for another that is less confining, less brutal, and more promising. The world of the carnival appeals far more than a life of marriage to a cruel coal miner and separation from her family at such close range. By taking herself permanently away, she can stop trying to reestablish broken family ties and can give up living a poetic fantasy.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of *Belle Prater's Boy* is essential to the action because it details the lifestyle and outlook of a real coal mining community at the confluence of Black River and Slag Creek, near Coal Station, Virginia. Events dot the map on both sides of the Appalachians: Love attends college in Radford. Amos comes from Cold Mountain. The television is within the broadcasting range of Charleston, West Virginia. Porter and his wife go to Abingdon to visit family. Other real settings include Woodrow's stories of Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, and Clinch Valley, Grandpa's boyhood on Wiley Mountain, Mrs. Cooper's sister in Roanoke, Gypsy and her mother's purchase of school clothes in Bristol, the drive home through Abingdon and Lebanon, Mr. Collins's brother in Fincastle, Granny and Grandpa's visit to her sister in Wytheville, and Porter and Love's honeymoon at Myrtle Beach.

Overlaying the place names on the map are the idiom of the Appalachians, country music classics, and the flora and fauna that endear Gypsy and Woodrow to their homeland. Songs such as "Nobody's Darling" and "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountains" pair with stories of premature burial, pranks, wading in the creek during a social event, and Decoration Day, a holiday celebrated in areas where Civil War battles produced large numbers of casualties and post-war monuments and rituals. Gypsy, named for trailing arbutus, shares with Woodrow a taste for gothic tales, familiar landmarks such as Mammoth Cave, jaunts to Bristol, close associations with grandparents, Sunday church attendance, and cooking foods common to the area.

Less sanguine is a social milieu that ostracizes a plain

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community girl who chooses to marry a coal miner and live in squalor rather than remain in town with her parents and recover from a broken heart. The hauteur of Mrs. Cooper and the debutantes contrasts the plainspoken counsel of loving grandparents who live in unembellished mountain style. Likewise touching is Gypsy's intent to spare her cross-eyed, poorly dressed cousin the taunts of town children and to smooth his transition from motherless boy to well-adjusted family member. The upshot of the novel is that Gypsy gets more than she gives. By allying with Woodrow, she gains the true friend who rescues her from self-deception.

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Ruth White's *Belle Prater's Boy* should include these aspects:

Themes

- desertion
- loss
- repression
- isolation
- discovery
- displacement
- ridicule
- self-esteem
- sharing
- acceptance

Motifs

- loss of family members
- living out a fantasy
- asserting self-control
- coping with gossip
- acknowledging self-doubt
- taking responsibility for actions

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter numbers and page numbers pinpoint the context in which the item appears.

1. Next door to us Granny and Grandma Ball had the same conveniences in one of those big old, white, green-shuttered, two-story houses with a wraparound porch on both floors. (Chapter 1, p. 7)
(The use of porches in Southern homes augments breezes and shade and cuts down on glare and heat indoors. In winter, the bolstering of a house with porches produces a similar separation from cold, inclement weather and accumulations of ice and snow. In addition, the use of wraparound porches gives a relaxed air to a house and invites people to sit, relax, and converse apart from stiffer parlor furnishings and stuffy formal dining rooms.)
2. It was the only way I could tolerate having hair longer than Rapunzel's. (Chapter 1, p. 9)
(Early in the novel, Gypsy introduces a favorite female rescue motif, which derives from the German folklore collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The story depicts a hapless girl immured in a tower and incapable of helping herself except through the natural process of growing hair, which offers access to the outside world. When the tresses are long enough for a male rescuer to climb, she locates the prince charming who will take her away from undeserved isolation. However, in this novel,
3. —Jalal al-Din Rumi, thirteenth Century. (Chapter 1, p. 14)
(A teller of illustrative fables, Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi or Mawlana [Our Master], a thirteenth-century Iranian theologian and mystic Arab poet, wrote stories to instruct and enlighten disciples and produced the epic encyclopedia of mysticism, Masnavi-ye Ma'navi [Spiritual Couplets], an adjunct to the Koran, which is the Islamic holy book. Rumi's work was the impetus to the Mawlawiyah order commonly called the Whirling Dervishes, seekers of otherworldliness and perfection.)
4. "Hidy, Raymond," Esau said; then he leaned over and whispered something. (Chapter 3, p. 29)
(This Appalachian dialect, as indicated by Esau's pronunciation of "howdy," is Southern mountain, one of the five major language subgroups of the South. The other four are Tidewater, the eastern Virginia dialect spoken by Mr. Collins; Gullah, the West African dialect of Charleston and Savannah; Creole, the French blend of New Orleans; and Uncle Remus, a designation for the drawl common to most of the South.)
5. The twins curled up on the couch and went to sleep while the women cleared up the dishes, and Grandpa and Porter commenced discussing President Eisenhower. (Chapter 4, p. 37)
(The Eisenhower era covers the post-World War II years, especially his two terms of office from 1952-1956 and 1956-1960. Beloved for his grandfatherly appeal and admired for his command of the European Theater of Operations during the fall of Nazism, he symbolized the family-centered goodness, buoyant prosperity, and progressive outlook of the age. In contrast to the Hoover and Roosevelt years, which saw the nation through its worst economic depression, the Eisenhower years were filled with growth, a high birth rate, and economic and industrial expansion.)
6. My room, all ruffled and lacy, was very spacious, and as pink and white as the spring, with a canopy bed; a nightstand and a lamp beside it where I always had good books to read; my own desk; a dresser with a big brass mirror over it; a chest of drawers and a closet so full of clothes I couldn't keep track of them. (Chapter 5, p. 39)
(Gypsy's possessions and little girl comforts suggest a family that focuses on her wants and needs to the point of spoiling her. The canopy bed and frilliness frame her like a doll in a dollhouse. The picture of her bedroom implies that she is treasured, perhaps a little too much. However, the one thing her mother and stepfather can't do for her is to return Amos, the light of her life.)
7. Woodrow's story was about Floyd Collins, a man who liked to explore the great Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. And what happened to him when he went spelunking alone one day was a sorrowful thing. (Chapter 8, p. 71)
(Spelunking, or cave exploration, is both hobby and scientific study. Where caves are common, engineers must study the ground structure, water content, and other factors affecting building, roadwork, agriculture, and pollutants. In addition to turning caves into tourist attractions, government planners use them for storage and as

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ready-made laboratories to study weather, temperature, nocturnal animals, underground aquifers, minerals, anthropology, and archeology.)

8. Friday evening, right after supper, Woodrow and I, along with Granny and Grandpa, were watching *I Led Three Lives* on television. (Chapter 9, p. 75)
(*I Led Three Lives* was a weekly show about an FBI agent posing as a Communist infiltrator. The popularity of Richard Carlson's character in the television series reflects an interest in Communism, which was the national bugbear of the 1940s and 1950s. Following the McCarthy witch hunt for hidden Communists, the series capitalized on the secretive, cloak-and-dagger aspect of Communism and the allure of espionage as an extreme form of patriotism.)
9. "Chiggers is awful this year," he said. "I might near wore my fangers down to a nub, jist a-scratchin' myself." (Chapter 11, p. 93)
(A problem for outdoor activities, such as hunting, berrying, and hiking, the six-legged mite and member of the Trombiculidae family produces severe discomfort in human skin, usually in the tender area around the genitals. Although the chigger is minuscule, its tendency to crawl to warm, tight areas such as the elastic around ankles and torso and to burrow into flesh to suck blood causes intense itching, which can lead to infection if the victim scratches each bite with dirty nails.)
10. And the next time anybody saw them, they were down at the Church of Jesus getting saved. (Chapter 12, p. 107)
(Gypsy and Woodrow live in a community dominated by religious fundamentalism. A focus of worship is a public admission of sin and a demonstration of change of heart, symbolized by baptism and church membership. Persons who desire to "get saved" come to the front of the worship area during the altar call, profess an intent to be redeemed from sin, and cleanse themselves of wrongdoing and harmful attitudes by accepting Jesus and his teachings as the rule and goal of their lives.)

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 from the novel.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Summarize Woodrow's background.
(The cousin of his best friend Gypsy, Woodrow is the only child of Belle Ball and Everett Prater. He was born after Belle lost Amos Leemaster to her sister Love, Gypsy's mother. Impulsive in her grief and low self-esteem, Belle chose a coal miner who had come to town on payday and left home with him to escape the pain of seeing Love and Amos together. The marriage was too soon for Belle to realize she had chosen the wrong mate. Her longing for release from drudgery and poverty was evident in her choice of poetry to memorize and fantasies to enact.
The Prater family lived in an isolated hollow far from Woodrow's grandparents. After Belle ran away when Woodrow was eleven years old, she appears to have given up her old life to join the carnival. She left Woodrow with an inadequate father who subdues sor-
- row with alcohol and shows little grief over losing both wife and son. At the beginning of the novel, Woodrow comes to his grandparents' home with hope of a good life near his cousin Gypsy. While he is learning to live among town people, to dress in new clothes, and to go to the barbershop, he is compensating for losing so much of the past.)
 2. What causes unhappiness at Porter Dotson's home?
(Although Porter Dotson is a loving, empathetic man, he is unable to win his stepdaughter's love. After his wife Love was widowed from Amos Leemaster, she married Porter, the editor of the town newspaper. Gypsy, Love's daughter, resents Porter because he replaced Amos, her beloved father, who died by shooting himself in the face. Gypsy's repressed memory of seeing his corpse through the window causes recurrent nightmares and fits of temper and willfulness. She is also tense about having to practice the piano daily and care for her long blond curls, which must be laboriously washed, dried, curled, and brushed. At angry moments, she verbalizes her dislike of Porter and blames Love for marrying him.)
 3. How does the movie illuminate Gypsy's unhappiness?
(Gypsy and Woodrow share a love for movies. Their grandmother compromises on attendance at movies by making them play outdoors in good weather and see films on rainy days. On one of their jaunts, Porter accompanies them. At the theater, Gypsy sits with her back to Porter and talks with Woodrow as a demonstration of her distaste for her stepfather. The arrangement precedes a significant moment in Gypsy's coming to knowledge. As the threesome becomes engrossed in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Gypsy grows hysterical at suspense and menace and must be carried home and put to bed. Ostensibly, her terror is caused by measles, but her inner turmoil contributes to the frightful collapse and delirium that Doc Dot treats with bedtime drinks of hot rum. Later, Woodrow recalls that the fearful movie forced Gypsy to examine the cause of her nightmares and to relive the horror of finding her father dead in his room in a pool of blood.)
 4. How does Woodrow offset Mrs. Cooper's cruel questions?
(From the moment she meets Woodrow, Mrs. Cooper, wife of the school principal, asks nosy questions about Belle's disappearance and inquires whether Woodrow knows anything about his mother's whereabouts. At the spring social, where Gypsy and Woodrow serve Love's guests with exotic sandwiches and peach ice, Mrs. Cooper continues probing Woodrow's background. To end the torment, Woodrow brings her extra servings of the beverage and implies that he has spiked them with rum. Mrs. Cooper becomes psychologically intoxicated and longs to cool off in the creek as she did in her girlhood. She makes a fool of herself by hiking her dress to her thighs and wading in the creek with the town debutantes.)
 5. How does Granny's birthday end the novel?
(After Gypsy recovers from the nightmares of bloody animals with no faces and accepts the visions as memories of her father's suicide, the family gathers in a congenial atmosphere to celebrate Granny Ball's birthday. Woodrow reads his tribute to Blind Benny, an essay

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assigned for English class. Porter toasts his mother-in-law and her long-term piano student, Gypsy, whom he encourages to give a piano recital. Love suggests that Gypsy use the next two months as preparation time for the musicale.

Woodrow also profits from the occasion with a boost in self-esteem. Doc Dot announces that he has found an eye specialist in Baltimore who may be able to correct Woodrow's crossed eyes. Gypsy is so elated at the events of the evening that she concludes, "What a night! What a party! it was by far the best one we ever had.")

Questions 6 - 8 Interpretive Level

6. Why are Woodrow and Gypsy suited as cousins and friends?

(Woodrow and Gypsy, both twelve years old and entering adolescence, share the Ball family's trials and losses. Woodrow's social needs and his crossed eyes and pathetic wardrobe offer the family a chance to be generous and to introduce him to town life after the unforeseen loss of his mother. Gypsy's emotional insecurity, concealed beneath her beautiful hair, talent for music, and self-absorption as the family focus, become Woodrow's opportunity to repay the Ball family for welcoming him and giving him a stable home. As the children bolster each other in difficult times, they share secrets, watch television and read comics, repair to the tree house, and enjoy a private friendship with Blind Benny. Both children display their character by maintaining mutual love and loyalty to a cousin in need. At the end of the novel, their most pressing problems are resolved and their future seems much more promising as they accept the truth about their missing parents. Gypsy surmises, "Aunt Belle had left Woodrow on purpose just like my daddy left me. Not because they didn't love us. They did. But their pain was bigger than their love. You had to forgive them for that.")

7. What aspects of Appalachian culture color the text? (Appalachia forms a tapestry of foods, sounds, folklore, and natural beauty for the story. Local people are regular churchgoers who also gossip and listen to the Grand Ole Opry. Blind Benny sings mountain favorites, such as "Nobody's Darling." Families live close together. The architectural style of the Ball house and wraparound porch demonstrates the relaxed sociability of mountain people. Frequent Southern mountain words, dialect, and idiom color exchanges in the barber shop and at school, church, and home.

It is appropriate that Gypsy is named for the trailing arbutus, root of the nickname Beauty. She and Woodrow enjoy the orchard and eat of the bounty of the area. Their favorite foods reflect mountain cooking, especially cornbread, peach ice, and berry pies. Woodrow's mastery of Appalachian lore enables him to elude public scorn and ridicule through the tall tale about the tapeworm, the ghost tale about Aunt Millie's ring finger and premature burial, an account of a recipe that makes people invisible, and the historical commentary on a spelunker trapped in Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. Overall, the work fits the area in which it takes place.)

8. Why is Love careful about helping Gypsy accept the truth?

(Both Porter and Love know that Gypsy is so enamored with her idealized picture of Amos that she is unable to accept a mature blend of his strengths and weaknesses. Love hesitantly points out that Gypsy's father was a gorgeous man who swept her off her feet, but he was too absorbed in outward appearances. He named his exceptional little girl Gypsy Arbutus, nicknamed her Beauty, and took her everywhere he went, thus setting her up for the pain of permanent separation.

On the positive side, Amos was a worthy man and local citizen. He accomplished good works, such as rescuing Blind Benny from mountain ignorance that cast him as the sin eater, organizing the civic league to help the poor, and joining the volunteer fire department. However, after he ruined his handsome face at a fire, Amos was unable to cope with the loss of good looks and chose to kill himself and end his life with his wife and family rather than to cope with disfigurement. The choice implies that Amos loved physical beauty more than he loved Gypsy.

Love's tender explanation of Gypsy's idealized father helps the child cope with nightmares and temper tantrums. Love obviously intends to encourage Gypsy's acceptance of Porter as stepfather so the threesome can live like a real family. The honest answers about falling in love and being swept away by a handsome man arrive at an important time in Gypsy's life, as she enters adolescence and begins making her own decisions about love, marriage, and family. The explanation of Love's stealing Belle's boyfriend also helps explain the torment of the Prater family, who had withdrawn from Grandpa and Granny Ball. By the end of the novel, all living members appear to have reunited in acceptance and peace with the flawed past.)

Questions 9 and 10 - Critical Level

9. Why is Blind Benny a pivotal character in the novel? (It is essential that Gypsy receive an unprejudiced account of her childhood from outsiders, such as the barber and ticket seller. The meeting with Blind Benny introduces a figure who remembers Amos for his good deeds rather than his handsome face. To Benny, Amos's distaste for the role of sin eater results in Benny's life-long dependence on Amos and a home supplied over Amos's hardware store. The poignant songs that Benny sings and his love for animals and acceptance of humble gifts of clothing, food, and tobacco from local people suggest the path that Gypsy must take if she is to thrive and gracefully mature.

Woodrow's paean to Blind Benny honors the altruism of Amos Leemaster and the shared bounty that Benny confers on Gypsy. The gift of an unbiased opinion of Amos boosts Gypsy toward full acceptance of the horror that stalks her sleep and leads her to self-mutilation. With the help of Woodrow and Benny, Gypsy moves toward a genuine understanding of the complexity of Amos's life and death.)

10. What does the novel say about children who yearn for a missing parent? (Both Woodrow and Gypsy long for closure on the subject of where, how, and why their parents deserted them. Woodrow, a marked child who is both homely and poor, compensates for his need through wit, humor, and

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clever tales. Gypsy, the gorgeous Rapunzel and piano player, can cope with daylight, but not night or gruesome movies. The mutual yearnings of each cousin for an explanation of desertion comes about through shared fun and hardships.

Each cousin performs acts of redemption. Because Woodrow remains loyal to Gypsy and wallops Buzz Osborne for his cruelty, he endears himself more fully to her. Because Gypsy protects Woodrow from exclusion among town people and shares her tree house, he values her friendship and generosity and grows strong in self-esteem. At the end of the story, neither child has the whole picture of Belle's desertion and Amos's suicide, but their partial understanding is enough to allow them to transcend the past and move on into new challenges. At the end of the novel, Gypsy has two months to prepare for the piano recital; Woodrow faces a medical procedure in Baltimore to uncross his eyes. Both stand to gain from a future based on honesty and endeavor rather than the mistakes and human failings of their parents' past.)

Questions 11 and 12 - Creative Level

11. In a speech, typify the entertainments of the 1950s, particularly comic strips, comic books, movies, and television.
12. Account for scenes set late at night or early in the morning. Why do Woodrow and Gypsy sneak out of the house? Why did Belle leave in the predawn hours? How does Blind Billy introduce both children to aspects of town life that they might miss if they weren't out with him until 2:00 A. M.? Why does Gypsy choose their wanderings as a day she would like to live again?

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Cinema

View several realistic films and television series on life in Appalachia, including *The Waltons*, *Christy*, *The Winter People*, *Where the Lilies Bloom*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Spencer's Mountain*, *Foxfire*, and *Wildwood Flower*. Discuss with a small group the types of friendships that blossom among isolated mountain people and the source of strong family and community loyalty.

Science and Health

1. Compose a lecture on the causes of emotional distress. Contrast the pressures on Woodrow and Gypsy with those that beset Amos and Belle. Comment on the source of individual distress and the causes of self-abnegation, despair, and bereavement.
2. List the dangers of repressing personal calamity, such as nightmares, outbursts, and self-destructive behavior. Suggest how music can help Gypsy overcome her anger at Amos for leaving her so abruptly.
3. Explain to a small group what survival techniques Woodrow employs to make life bearable after his mother deserts the family. Note his skill with humor, fiction, and practical jokes.

Geography

1. Create a mural or web site that introduces these settings: Black River and Slag Creek, Coal Station, Virginia, Radford, Cold Mountain, Charleston, West Virginia, Abingdon, Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, Clinch Val-

ley, Wiley Mountain, Roanoke, Bristol, Lebanon, Fincastle, Wytheville, and Myrtle Beach.

2. Compose a paragraph typifying the topography of Appalachia. Include comments about flora and fauna that are crucial to the novel. Contrast Belle's native background with that of Jalal al-Din Rumi, the Sufist poet whose work pleases her.

Art

Using desk-top publishing or other artistic media, design a road sign for Bristol, Tennessee, a calling card for a newspaper editor or Presbyterian minister, invitations for a spring social or wienie roast, a death notice for Amos Leemaster, sketches and prices of a Dixie Pixie, announcements of debutante coming-out parties or Gypsy's recital, recipes for concoctions to make people invisible, a schedule of school holidays, instructions for the care of children with measles, movies reviews of "Rear Window," and a local map showing the way from downtown to Belle Prater's home.

Law

1. Launch an internet web site explaining the legal ramifications of suicide or missing persons. Comment on Woodrow's need to know whether his mother is living or dead. Explain how her disappearance limits Everett's opportunity to marry again.
2. Determine the rights and responsibilities of a stepfather like Porter or guardians like Grandpa and Granny Ball.

Economics

1. Determine the cost of searching for missing persons through detective work and electronic identification systems that match social security numbers, fingerprints, dental records, and other details.
2. Contrast the total income of a school teacher and newspaper editor in contrast to that of a coal miner.

Social Studies

1. Write a brief address explaining the need for counseling of troubled young people or for children who become violent or disruptive in school.
2. Characterize in a paragraph the Eisenhower years. Note how times and the economy and national outlook changed from the Depression and World War II eras. Comment on the coming of television.
3. Discuss the growth of comic strips and comic books in the 1940s and 1950s, including Spider Man, Lulu and Sluggo, Joe Palooka, Slime, Red Ryder, Dick Tracy, and Superman.

Psychology

1. Make contrasting chalkboard definitions of repression, identity crisis, ego ideal, destructive personalities, schizophrenia, and depression.
2. Determine what factors force Woodrow and Gypsy to accept their parents for both positive and negative qualities. Comment on occasions that cause old memories to resurface, particularly visits with friends and family or anniversaries of important dates such as the disappearance and suicide.
3. List causes and symptoms of Gypsy's self-mutilation, for example, stress, nightmares, and maturation. Contrast her chopped-off hair with Amos's shooting himself in the face.

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4. Use pantomime or dramatic improvisation to explain ways that boys like Woodrow learn to overcome their social limitations.

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, create a family tree including Belle Ball Prater, Everett Prater, Woodrow Prater, Grandpa and Granny Ball, Granny's sister, Love Ball Dotson, Amos Leemaster, Porter Doston, Gypsy Leemaster, Bobby Robert Dotson, Russell, and Dr. Hubert Dotson and his wife and twin girls, Dottie and DeeDee.
2. Supply state-by-state information about the number of people each year who disappear and establish new identities. Name your sources.

Music

Work with a group to list musical accompaniment for taped readings from *Belle Prater's Boy*. Include Appalachian and country melodies such as "Barbara Allen" and "I Wonder As I Wander," "The Lone Wild Bird," "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountains," "Nobody's Darling," Ferde Grofe's *On the Trail*, and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.

Language and Speech

1. Compose individual posters explaining some of these terms: holler, bluegrass, honkytonk, foul play, arbutus, wraparound porch, Rapunzel, crossed eyes, hillbilly, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Civic League, frontal lobotomy, sideboard, Harry Truman, Siberia, canopy bed, "Aba Daba Honeymoon," Alcatraz, spelunking, Mammoth Cave, Little Jimmy Dickens, *I Led Three Lives*, Rocket Man, Roy Rogers, Tarzan, Alfred Hitchcock, chiggers, "Hernando's Hideaway," *Lorna Doone*, Abominable Snowman, getting saved, Eleanor Roosevelt, Decoration Day, Katzenjammer Kids, L'il Abner, coming out for debutantes, John Cameron Swayze, Eddie Fisher, "Oh, My Pa-Pa," Presbyterian manse, Little Beaver, Nancy Drew, consumption, sin eater, and Prince Valiant.
2. Compose a short speech in which you describe how self-deception and family unrest alter the lifestyles of Woodrow, Love, Porter, Grandpa, Granny Ball, and Gypsy.
3. Characterize in separate paragraphs the difference between the real Amos Leemaster and the Prince Valiant whom Gypsy envisions riding over the mountains.

Literature

1. Using nonfiction, novels, plays, and stories, read aloud scenes of self-discovery and acceptance. Include Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path," Olive Ann Burns's *Cold Sassy Tree*, Cynthia Rylant's *Missing May*, Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, *Go Ask Alice*, Robert Cormier's *After the First Death*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Lois Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, Phyllis Naylor's *Shiloh*, Robert Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, Toni Cade Bambara's "Blues Ain't No Mockin' Bird," and Lois Lowry's *The Giver*.
2. Using examples from the novel, suggest scenes that reflect Ruth White's use of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* as an epigraph. What did he mean by "What is essential is invisible to the eye"?

3. Draw a character web representing the interconnectedness between Woodrow, Gypsy, Porter, Grandpa, Amos, Belle, Love, Grandpa, Granny, and Blind Benny.

Education

Brainstorm ways that classroom teachers can assist troubled students in coping with personal and family trauma, particularly through keeping a journal, reading young adult fiction, discussing personal topics aloud, and writing first-person poetry.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Organize a panel discussion of loss. Discuss how Ruth White's novel contrasts family situations and teaches two cousins to aid each other in searching for closure by accepting truth rather than shoring up fantasies.
2. Launch a discussion group of advice to a stepparent on dealing with a rude or wayward stepchild such as Gypsy. Suggest timely punishments for rude behavior like turning away from an adult or chastising a parent for remarrying. Replace dysfunctional family time with structured activities aimed at building and supporting positive attitudes, such as decorating for holidays, cooking together, gathering vegetables and fruit, hiking, telling ghost stories, and preparing a birthday celebration.
3. List questions to ask at an interrogation of family members concerning Amos's death. For example, suggest information about Amos's health and state of mind, the length of time he had owned a gun and ammunition, recent emotional setbacks, debts, enmities, and disappointments.
4. Compose a web site naming enjoyable literature about families, such as Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* or Cynthia Rylant's *Missing May*. Mount scenes that express positive family situations, for example, mealtime, church and school attendance, and ceremonies such as graduations, birthdays, and musical recitals.
5. Explain with a collage or mobile how Woodrow's family fell apart after Belle left. Depict Everett's new alliance, Woodrow's contentment with his grandparents, and his love for his cousin Gypsy.
6. Dramatize a meeting between Woodrow and his mother. Account for her abrupt departure and her decision to leave both husband and son. Suggest questions that Woodrow may have, for instance, how and where she supports herself, if she misses him, and what she intends to do about her marriage to Everett. Fill in family happenings Belle has missed, especially Gypsy's maturity and her skill at piano.
7. Create a list of images from the novel that appeal to the five senses. Use these as models: "She watches my hands when we're having a lesson, and she can see a wrong note almost before I hit it," "I saw a slow flush go over her face, and her lip began to tremble," "Mrs. Cooper clapped one hand over her mouth to stifle a sputter and reached for the glass with the other," "The apples were almost gone, but their sweet aroma lingered in the air," and "The dogs nosed around the water's edge while we sat on the rock looking at the moon reflected in the water. There were billions of stars dancing between the mountaintops, and we could hear

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the water lapping gently against the bank."

8. Write a scene in which Gypsy asks Porter to adopt her. Express her concern that she has not welcomed him to the family and that she owes him thanks for his wise counsel and love. Comment on her choice of a last name — either Leemaster or Dotson.
9. Discuss the effects of gossip, nightmares, misconceptions, misgivings, low self-esteem, public ridicule, anguish, and loss on Gypsy and Woodrow. Summarize the revelation of truth about Gypsy's father.
10. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram illustrating the changes that take place in Gypsy and Woodrow and the forces that ease their personal trauma. Make parallel charts depicting the lives of Everett and Love.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of terror, insecurity, public humiliation, loyalty, victory, torment, and guilt among members of the Ball family.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate how Woodrow profits from living with Grandpa and Granny Ball.
3. Compose a scene in which Woodrow returns from Baltimore.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Gypsy's discontent, Love's comfort, Grandpa's honesty, Mrs. Cooper's nosiness, Porter's understanding, Doc Dot's treatment, Woodrow's friendship, and Buzz's cruelty.
5. Account for Gypsy's refusal to recall Amos's suicide.

WHITE'S PUBLISHED WORKS

Sweet Creek Holler, 1992

Weeping Willow, 1994

Belle Prater's Boy, 1996

"A Way Through the Wood," *Venture Inward*, November-December 1997

RELATED READING

Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*

Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockin' Bird"

Olive Ann Burns, *Cold Sassy Tree*

Richard Chase, ed., *Jack Tales*

Donald Davis, *Southern Jack Tales*

Lois Duncan, *Killing Mr. Griffin*

Go Ask Alice

Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird*

Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Phyllis Naylor's *Missing May*

Robert Peck, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*

Cynthia Rylant, *Missing May*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Eudora Welty, "A Worn Path"

Eliot Wigginton, *Foxfire*

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about Appalachia, bullying, loss, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

Acting on Your Values, Rosen Publishing Group

Characters in Crisis, Center for Humanities

Foxfire, University of North Carolina Press

Grief Recovery Handbook, HarperCollins

"Mammoth Cave," Kentucky Visitors Bureau
No Man Is an Island, Center for the Humanities
Stand Tall, AGS Media

Also, consult these websites:

"Bullying: A Survival Guide," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/bully/deal.htm>.

"The Bullying Problem,"

<http://home.navisoft.com/aapa/bully1.htm>.

"Crisis, Grief, and Healing," <http://www.webhealing.com>.

"Depression Homepage," <http://www.depression.com>.

"Museum of Appalachia,"

<http://thesmokies.mountainarts.com/app.htm>.

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"Belle Prater's Boy," <http://www.bdd.com/teachers/bell.html>.

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[http://www.bookwire.com/Bookinfo.Title\\$T000005495](http://www.bookwire.com/Bookinfo.Title$T000005495).

"Family Secrets," *School Library Journal*, March 1, 1997.

"Interview," <http://www.bdd.com/teachers/bell.html>.

Oothoudt, Sharon Johnson, "Review," *Book Report*, September/October 1996, p. 45.

"Review," *Horn Book*, September/October 1996, p. 601.

"Review," *School Library Journal*, December 1, 1996.

"Review," *Teaching PreK-8*, November/December 1996, p. 54.

White, Ruth, "A Way Through the Wood," http://www.are-cayce.com/vi/nov-dec97/art4_wood.htm.

Wolitzer, Meg, "Review," *New York Times*, October 27, 1996, Sect. 7, p. 44.

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VOCABULARY TEST

In the sentences that follow, select terms from the list below to replace the boldfaced words with synonyms.

addled	crinolines	gawky	manipulate	saturation
admonitions	delectables	impulsiveness	mesmerized	soared
burrow	dumbfounded	lobotomy	pinkie	spelunking
commenced	exertion	loft	reflex	straitjacket
craw	exotic	maggot	revisions	traipsing

1. There was no evidence of foul play and no indication that she went **adventuring** off to somewhere else.
2. We were **beguiled**, brainwashed, hypnotized, whatever you want to call it.
3. He said if folks heard me carrying on about a place in the air, they'd think I was **confused** in the head.
4. 'Course Aunt Millie had to wear it on her **little finger** after that.
5. I was gasping with **struggle**, but my anger was not spent.
6. My spirits **rose**.
7. The tapeworm story had gone through about fifty **alterations**.
8. They were tiny, almost microscopic bugs that like to crawl up under your clothes and **dig** into the white, fleshy places where the sun never touches.
9. Woodrow was **thin** and backward and wore hillbilly clothes that were hand-me-downs from his daddy and his daddy's brother, Russell.
10. So I shrugged away all of Mama's **warnings** and blurted it out.
11. And what happened to him when he went **exploring** alone one day was a sorrowful thing.
12. Putting Porter between me and Woodrow wasn't even an option for me, but it looked like that's what Porter was trying to **arrange** when we found three empty seats together in the balcony.
13. I got down beside him and **started** handing nails to him.
14. We were also in charge of serving refreshments, which consisted of dainty sandwiches of **rare** substances, mints, nuts, and Mama's special drink, which she named Peach Ice.
15. She was standing back a piece from the other spectators, her pink polished fingernails resting lightly at her pretty white throat—totally **amazed**.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____

BELLE PRATER'S BOY

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with characters. Choose your answers from the list of names below. You may use some of the answers more than once and some not at all.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| _____ 1. appears with a blonde in the car. | A. Porter |
| _____ 2. starts a civic league to aid the poor. | B. Grandpa |
| _____ 3. tells Gypsy her nickname was once Beauty. | C. Gypsy |
| _____ 4. buys clothes for Woodrow. | D. Granny |
| _____ 5. rescues Gypsy from the movie theater. | E. Clint |
| _____ 6. brings Gypsy a fan and radio. | F. Buzz |
| _____ 7. pretends to put rum in the peach ice. | G. Woodrow |
| _____ 8. reveals to Gypsy how her father committed suicide. | H. Amos |
| _____ 9. invents the Dixie Pixie. | I. Doc Dot |
| _____ 10. wishes she could spare Belle the pain of rejection. | J. Blind Benny |
| _____ 11. returns to the tree house during Love's honeymoon. | K. Millie |
| _____ 12. sings "When the Moon Comes over the Mountain." | L. Belle |
| _____ 13. chooses Arbutus as a child's name. | M. Love |
| _____ 14. is rescued from premature burial. | N. Mrs. Cooper |
| _____ 15. longs to wade in the creek. | O. Everett |

Part III: Short Answer (10 points)

Explain the significance of the following details:

1. hardware store
2. piano recital
3. Baltimore
4. nightmare
5. button

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Part III: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Finish each of these statements:

1. Woodrow regrets Buzz's outburst in class because _____

2. Porter recognizes that Gypsy is wounded because _____

3. Gypsy walks by Amos's window because _____

4. Belle married Everett because _____

5. The fact that Belle took Woodrow's clothes is a clue because _____

6. The place where worlds meet draws Belle because _____

7. Woodrow tells a ghost story at the wienie roast because _____

8. The tapeworm story establishes Woodrow's reputation because _____

9. Gypsy pretends to like the Dixie Pixie because _____

10. Doc Dot prescribes hot rum because _____

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Account for Woodrow's love of his cousin.
2. Describe the first day in 6-B.
3. Discuss the significance of Gypsy's chopped-off hair.
4. Summarize details of the spring social.
5. Explain why people are curious about Woodrow's mother.

BELLE PRATER'S BOY

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Identify a setting that fits each of the following descriptions. Select your answers from the list that follows.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| _____ 1. Gypsy wishes to live the day over. | A. tree house |
| _____ 2. Gypsy looks in the window. | B. Belle's favorite place |
| _____ 3. Mr. Collins listens to Woodrow describe himself. | C. Clint's barbershop |
| _____ 4. Woodrow tells Gypsy a secret. | D. Amos's room |
| _____ 5. Mrs. Cooper seems drunk. | E. rock |
| _____ 6. Porter takes Gypsy in private after hours. | F. wienie roast |
| _____ 7. Gypsy turns her back on Porter. | G. 6-B |
| _____ 8. Woodrow recalls vibrations in the air. | H. creek |
| _____ 9. Blind Benny has a free room. | I. theater |
| _____ 10. Woodrow deliberately gives up his seat. | J. hardware store |

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the paired blanks with answers that complete each statement.

1. At _____'s birthday party, _____ proposes a toast to his mother-in-law.
2. Gypsy must remain indoors in the dark for _____ days, but Woodrow visits her at the _____.
3. _____ has never been to a _____ until Grandpa sends him.
4. After the _____, _____ is ashamed of his face.
5. _____ believes that _____ cared too much about appearances and could not live with disfiguration.

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Place an X by statements that refer to Woodrow.

- _____ 1. enjoys shopping for clothes in Bristol.
- _____ 2. grows confused when asked about family in 6-B.
- _____ 3. admits that Everett was cruel to Belle.
- _____ 4. cuts up classified ads from the Sunday paper.
- _____ 5. follows Belle through the place where worlds meet.
- _____ 6. covers the mirror.
- _____ 7. tells a story about a long tapeworm.
- _____ 8. suggests telling about the Dixie Pixie in the *New York Times*.
- _____ 9. warns Gypsy that "Rear Window" is a scary movie.
- _____ 10. wear's Russell's hand-me-downs.
- _____ 11. recites a poem by Rumi.
- _____ 12. knows that Belle might have hitchhiked to the carnival.
- _____ 13. follows Blind Benny until 2:00 A. M.
- _____ 14. joins debutantes at the creek.
- _____ 15. hates his father for drinking and dating a blond woman.

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Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. List and describe scenes in which Woodrow tells tall tales.
2. Describe the scene in which Gypsy grows hysterical.
3. Explain why Woodrow attacks Buzz.
4. Account for Gypsy's hatred of Porter.
5. Compare the backgrounds of Belle and Love or of Woodrow and Gypsy.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. traipsing | 9. gawky |
| 2. mesmerized | 10. admonitions |
| 3. addled | 11. spelunking |
| 4. pinkie | 12. manipulate |
| 5. exertion | 13. commenced |
| 6. soared | 14. exotic |
| 7. revisions | 15. dumbfounded |
| 8. burrow | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. A | 11. C |
| 2. H | 7. G | 12. J |
| 3. J | 8. F | 13. H |
| 4. B | 9. E | 14. K |
| 5. A | 10. M | 15. N |

Part II: Short Answer (10 points)

1. Love sells the store, but insists that the new owners allow Blind Benny to continue living upstairs.
2. Porter's suggestion that Gypsy perform gives her something to work toward and links her to Woodrow's mother, who longed to learn to play.
3. Doc Dot proposes taking Woodrow to Baltimore to have his eyes fixed.
4. The dream of the wounded animal with no face obscures Gypsy's memory of Amos's suicide.
5. Gypsy locates a button from Amos's shirt that he wore to meetings of the volunteer fire department.

Part III: Cause and Effect (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

1. Granny, Porter
2. ten, window
3. Woodrow, barbershop
4. fire, Amos
5. Love, Amos

Part III: Identification (20 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. | 6. | 11. X |
| 2. | 7. X | 12. X |
| 3. X | 8. | 13. X |
| 4. X | 9. | 14. |
| 5. | 10. X | 15. |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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