



Bloomability

by Sharon Creech

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter 1: First Life

In her "first life," Domenica Santolina Doone—"Dinnie"—lives with her mother, older brother and sister, Crick and Stella, and her dad when he isn't on the road. Dad is constantly uprooting the family in search of new "opportunities," refusing to stay in one place for more than a few months. Mom is originally a "city girl," and as the kids learn one day when Grandma Fiorelli visits, Mom's Italian immigrant family does not approve of her lifestyle and her ne'er-do-well husband. With every move, Crick gets in more trouble with the law, Stella acquires more "boyfriends," and Dinnie gives up more stuff, until she is down to one box of belongings. Finally, when Dinnie is thirteen, they settle in New Mexico. During the last week of Dinnie's old life, Crick goes to jail, Stella (who at sixteen has married a Marine who has immediately gone overseas) has a baby, and dad is on the road again.

Chapter 2: The Dot

Within a week, Dinnie's family gets a visit from Aunt Sandy (Mom's sister) and Uncle Max. After staying up all night talking with her family, Dinnie's mother sends her, the next day, with Sandy and Max to live with them in a school in Switzerland where Max will be working as the new headmaster—a true opportunity that Dinnie perceives as a "kidnapping." At first, Dinnie feels as if she is in a transparent bubble as she watches the changes in her life. "Bubble mode" gives way to terror as the plan takes off, then wonder at her first plane ride—although she thinks of herself as a "dot," like the objects she sees from the plane window. They fly from Albuquerque to Washington, D.C., where Dinnie gets a passport. Two weeks later, they fly to Zurich, Switzerland.

Chapter 3: An Opportunity

In Zurich, the trio are to catch a train to Lugano. In the station, Dinnie struggles to walk in her new clothes and shoes as she tries to make out the words in German, Italian, and French that she hears from the crowd. She realizes she recognizes a few of the Italian words—

words her mother used to say sometimes. Accustomed to moving, Dinnie suddenly is tired; she wants to stay put somewhere, and she wants to be with her family. Finally, in Lugano, they arrive at the beautiful chalet that comes with the position of headmaster. The house overlooks the village and has a view of a lake and mountains, and Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max think it's wonderful, but Dinnie, missing her family and feeling punished and abandoned by them, can't enjoy the view.

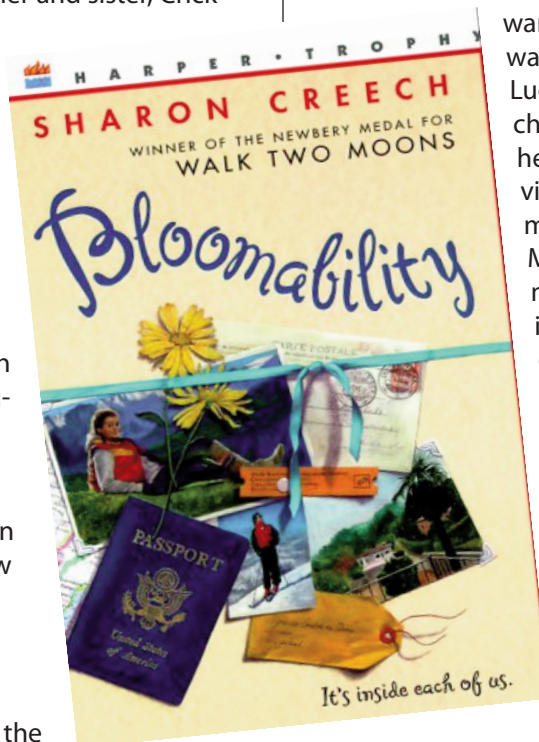
Chapter 4: The Two Prisoners

Dinnie explores the area around the school a section at a time, works on a "kidnapped" sign to hang in her window; Aunt Sandy suggests she translate it into Italian so the local people can read it, and buys her an English-Italian dictionary to help with the project. Dinnie also meets Guthrie, another student

her age who is returning for his second year. He sees that she isn't happy to be in this beautiful place, and tells her a story about two prisoners, one who looks down and sees only dirt, the other who looks up and sees only sky. It is a story about perspective, and a gentle suggestion that she can change hers.

Chapter 5: Postcards

Dinnie receives postcards from her father's sisters, Aunt Grace and Aunt Tillie, who live near each other in the country in Kentucky. Both send their love, mention the other's "not too good" cooking, and wonder if she has to speak "Switz" or wear leather knee breeches. What she doesn't get is a letter from her family. This saddens her but doesn't surprise her too much; it reminds her of one of their moves when she was smaller, when she came out of the restroom at a rest stop to discover the family



had driven off without her. They came back, of course, but the experience stayed with her.

Chapter 6: The Girl

Domenica meets another student, Lila. Lila is also an American (although her father works in Saudi Arabia), and she has also met Guthrie; she says she is going to “start fresh” at the American school. She is always laughing. Dinnie is quite taken with Lila, but wary of opening up. The two girls spend a few hours in Lugano and have lunch; afterwards, they return to Lila’s parents’ hotel room, and Dinnie meets Lila’s father, who seems critical and cold.

Chapter 7: The Queen

Mrs. Stirling, the school’s founder, visits. She is elegant and dynamic and very interested in everything and everybody; she is also very kind to Dinnie. Dinnie thinks she is like a Queen. She has founded several schools and has a villa in Italy. Dinnie tries to find out where in Italy and if it is close to where Grandma Fiorelli lived before moving to America. Uncle Max is excited about the upcoming year’s work, while Aunt Sandy feels overwhelmed by the day-and-night responsibility for several hundred teenagers.

Chapter 8: An Italian Tongue

Dinnie struggles with learning Italian, although her teacher tells her she has an “Italian tongue,” meaning she has good pronunciation. She sympathizes with all the non-American students trying to take classes in English. She continues to miss her family, but feels a little guilty when she realizes she’s enjoying herself and not thinking about them.

Chapter 9: Toes and Teeth

Dinnie gets another round of postcards from her aunts, in which they send her love, criticize each other’s cooking, and tell the latest news (one of the relatives had a toe operation, and an aunt is getting “new teeth”).

Chapter 10: Complaints

Lila’s true colors begin to show: she’s a chronic complainer and troublemaker, and a source of headaches for Uncle Max. She expects everyone and everything to adapt to her whims, and calls her parents in Saudi Arabia when she doesn’t get her way. Dinnie remains friends with her despite her bad behavior and selfish personality. On a whim, Dinnie invites Lila to supper.

Chapter 11: It’s So Rude

The dinner is unpleasant due to Lila’s constant com-

plaining. It is revealed that she dislikes everything and everyone that is not “American,” and that she thinks a so-called “American school” should contain only Americans and American culture.

Chapter 12: Nomads and Cuckoos

Dinnie is used to observing others so she’ll fit in, a skill she first learned from her older sister, Stella. As a result, she often doesn’t feel like she has an identity of her own. She admires Guthrie and Lila because they are individuals who seem comfortable in their own skins, although they are opposites—Guthrie is charismatic and positive, Lila is off-putting and negative. Strangely, Guthrie seems to like Lila, and the two spend a lot of time together. Dinnie also begins to realize that other students have led nomadic lives just like her. She begins to feel comfortable in a multi-cultural environment, and realizes that at her school (unlike others she’s attended), it’s cool to be different and to do well.

Chapter 13: Val Verzasca

On a field trip, Dinnie sees things with “double vision.” She sees what is there overlaid with similar things she’s seen in all the places she’s lived. It’s like carrying all those places around with her in her transparent bubble.

Chapter 14: Goober

In mid-October, Dinnie finally receives a brief letter from her mother, which contains a picture mother has drawn of a little girl fishing by a river—Dinnie. Dinnie treasures the letter. She also gets brief postcards from Crick (who calls her “Goober”), Aunt Grace, and Aunt Tillie. Once again, the two aunts include humorous observations about cooking, as well as inquiries about fishing, which is one of Dinnie’s favorite pastimes.

Chapter 15: Percorso

One day, Guthrie takes Dinnie on an expedition along a *Percorso*—a sort of huge, natural jungle gym for grown-ups. Dinnie finds a crystal clear stream where she returns the next day to fish. She feels both complete happiness and overwhelming homesickness.

Chapter 16: Bloomable

Dinnie has developed close friendships with Keisuke, a thoughtful and fun-loving boy from Japan who mangles the English language; Belen, his Spanish girlfriend who is beautiful and straightforward; Guthrie; and Lila. “Bloomability” is Keisuke’s word for “possibility.”

Chapter 17: Struggles

One day during English class, the teacher leads a discus-

sion about the struggles of the main character. Dinnie fears she is boring and believes struggles make a person interesting. When the teacher gives a writing assignment in which students talk about their struggles, Dinnie at first can't think of any; then, to her delight, she realizes that her problems with moving constantly, trying to fit in, figuring out who she is, and being homesick all counted as struggles. Delighted, she writes for hours.

Chapter 18: An Announcement

Lila announces that she isn't returning to school after the Christmas break; she hates school and everything about it. Dinnie is terribly upset, and tries to get Guthrie to persuade Lila to stay, but Lila won't listen. Meanwhile, the other students are looking forward to the winter ski trip to St. Moritz.

Chapter 19: Buon Natale

Dinnie has sent photographs to her family for Christmas, but hasn't received anything from them yet. They also haven't called, and their own phone has been disconnected. Aunt Sandy assures Dinnie that they probably sent something, but it was delayed. On Christmas Eve, Aunt Sandy, Uncle Max, and Dinnie go to a church service in the village, where they meet Mrs. Stirling. Later, Dinnie gets Christmas presents: gloves, goggles, and best of all, skis. She struggles with their generosity, but finally accepts the gift.

Chapter 20: Trees and Cows

The next week she receives letters from Crick and Aunt Tillie. Crick is happy to announce that he is not in jail and "may have a new opportunity."

Chapter 21: Libero

After Christmas break, 200 students from the American school go to St. Moritz to ski for two weeks. Guthrie thinks everything about it is "the best." Dinnie plans to stay off the slopes in hopes of seeing Lila, but her friends insist she ski with them.

Chapter 22: St. Moritz

For the first time, Dinnie shares a room with other students. She makes friends with her roommates; she also realizes she likes Guthrie. Finally, Lila shows up for the trip, a day late.

Chapter 23: Downfelling

Guthrie, Keisuke, Belen, and Lila are all experienced skiers; Lila is exhibiting a new, positive attitude. By the end of two weeks, Dinnie can ski down the beginner slope without falling or snowplowing.

Chapter 24: Disaster

During Global Awareness month, the class discusses all the major problems of the world. The intense curriculum, instituted by the previous headmaster, focuses on global atrocities and disasters, and causes many students to feel fearful, anxious, and guilty. Dinnie has nightmares. Finally, Uncle Max wraps up the Global Awareness Month curriculum after three weeks. He tells students that they must also learn about beauty and goodness in order to change the world for the better.

Chapter 25: Phone Call

In late February, Dinnie's Christmas package from her family arrives; it is a photo album with no photos, although it does contain paintings from her mother. Later, her parents call her on the phone. She learns that the judge allowed Crick to join the Air Force as an alternative to jail, and he accepted the opportunity. After the call, Dinnie struggles with homesickness.

Chapter 26: Hamburger and Peaches

Dinnie gets more postcards. Aunt Grace is making hamburger-peach casserole. Mother's postcard was addressed wrong and arrives six weeks late. She says they are in Taos, which is beautiful.

Chapter 27: Italian Invasion

Dinnie begins thinking and dreaming in Italian, even though she continues to struggle with vocabulary. In a postcard from her mother, she learns that her grandparents were born in Campobasso, Italy. In English, the class is to spend a month reading *Romeo and Juliet*; their assignment outside of class is simply "to think."

Chapter 28: Thinking

The English class continues thinking as their homework while reading *Romeo and Juliet*, which leads to lively discussions in class about various topics, some of which are suggested by the story (example: "should someone be your enemy if/because he is your parents' enemy?"). Unbeknownst to the students, Mr. Bonner, the English teacher, is getting them to examine their personal assumptions and explore important ideas, while teaching them key critical thinking skills such as analyzing topics and defending arguments.

Chapter 29: Andermatt

Some of the students go on a ski weekend to Andermatt. Guthrie skies with Dinnie until she is tired, then goes to ski the advanced slopes with Lila. Scared at the risks he's taking, Lila leaves him alone on the slopes. At the end of the day, all are accounted for but Guthrie; Signora Palermo leaves to find him.

Chapter 30: Waiting

Snowfall has become a blizzard; the students huddle together, worrying and waiting for Signora Palermo and Guthrie. Finally, the two appear—laughing about the last ski run. The other students are relieved and happy once they get over their worry. Lila, however, is angry with Guthrie, and refuses to speak to him on the train home.

Chapter 31: Pot Roast and Plans

Dinnie gets another postcard from her aunts. One invites her to stay with her in her home in Kentucky and learn to make pot roast. The other aunt (who lives in the same valley in Kentucky) fills Dinnie in on Crick's progress in the Air Force, and tells her that her father is making a "doozy" of a plan that will be great if it works out.

Chapter 32: The Pistol

Lila reverts to her old persona: the complaining, combative "Pistol." She complains about everything and claims to long for all things American. Then, she receives a letter: her mother is leaving her father and Saudi Arabia, and returning to the States, to live in Florida. Lila, ironically, is heartbroken that she'll have to leave. Guthrie proposes a last ski trip to the Dolomite Mountains as a farewell party for Lila; Dinnie, to her own surprise, is jealous.

Chapter 33: The Visitor

One night, Lila bangs on the door of Dinnie's house, waking everyone, to cry and complain about her impending move. Aunt Sandy hints that Lila's family is very troubled, but then refuses to tell Dinnie how, saying it would violate a trust. Dinnie is torn between annoyance and pity toward Lila; she resolves to be nice to her till she leaves.

Chapter 34: The Dolomites

They leave for the Dolomites, and Mr. Bonner passes out transceivers—transmitters that emit a signal so they can be found in case of an avalanche. Mrs. Palermo assures them that it is merely a safety precaution; Guthrie explains how to create an air pocket if you are accidentally buried in snow.

Chapter 35: Loud Snow

When they arrive, Dinnie and Mr. Bonner ride up on the lift but are afraid to ski back down, so they ride the lift down and wait for the others. Lila leads Guthrie off the regular run; Guthrie argues with her, but follows her further afield. Then, as the others watch in horror, Lila and Guthrie are caught in an avalanche.

Chapter 36: Signals

Dinnie carefully studies the landmarks so she can tell the searchers where her friends are. Everyone is glad the students are wearing transceivers, but then they find one left behind in the van and realize that either Guthrie or Lila is without. Later, it is revealed that Guthrie is the one who left his transceiver; Lila is located through hers and is airlifted, unconscious, to a hospital. As the students wait for Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max, Dinnie clings to hope for Guthrie's safe rescue.

Chapter 37: Watching

As they wait, the students are frightened by the talk of other veteran skiers, who comment on how "lucky" Lila is and how the chances of survival dwindle when a person has been buried more than five minutes.

Chapter 38: Voci Bianche

As Lila waits, she thinks about the difficulty of letting loved ones have adventures, even though there is danger; she realizes that her parents must have worried about her when she left, but didn't show it for her sake. Finally, she and the others are jubilant when Guthrie is found, and is alive.

Chapter 39: Upstanding

Guthrie is airlifted to the hospital in Milan, accompanied by Signora Palermo. Aunt Sandy and the uncharacteristically panicky Uncle Max arrive, and are enormously relieved to learn that Lila and Guthrie are alive and safe. They attempt to call the two students' parents. They are unable to get through to Lila's mother or Guthrie's family, but Lila's father launches into a tirade over the phone when he is reached by Aunt Sandy. However, he says he can't come to Italy due to Important Business he is conducting.

Chapter 40: Two Pistols

The adults finally reach Lila's mother and Guthrie's father. Lila's mother is hostile and angry, and agrees to come but insists the school pay for the plane ticket. Guthrie's father, who has been traveling, drops everything to visit "Petie" (Guthrie's first name is Peter); Dinnie learns that Guthrie "doesn't have a mother," and is grateful for her own. Lila's mother arrives, and turns out to be an older and nastier version of Lila at her worst; Lila begs to be allowed to stay, but Lila's mother insists that Lila be moved out and go back with her to America. Dinnie pities Lila. Finally, Lila and her mother leave for the States the next morning.

Chapter 41: Hats and Bugs

Dinnie gets Easter cards from her family. Her aunts

write: one has a new hat, the other tells her that Crick is in Air Force survival school, where he has to learn to live in the woods and eat bugs. She also hints again about Dinnie's father's great plan. Dinnie's mother also sends a card; it has a drawing of a heart with a fish in the middle.

Chapter 42: Fishing

Spring has come to campus, and it is beautiful and warm. Guthrie is out of the hospital and off crutches. A month before the end of term, she and Guthrie go on a planned two-part excursion together: first, they take a train to the top of Mt. San Salvatore to see the view (Guthrie's part); then, they go back down into the valley and to the *Percorso* where Dinnie had found the stream, and they fish (without bait). Guthrie tells Dinnie she's a very interesting person, and a happy Dinnie kisses him on the cheek.

Chapter 43: Forking Roads

The last weeks of school arrive. Uncle Max and Aunt Sandy give Dinnie a choice: she will return to America for the summer, and then she can choose whether to stay there with her family for school, or come back to Switzerland. She is not ready to decide. Later, at the middle school banquet, departing students give speeches. Guthrie gives one too, about how students are now taking divergent roads. He hints that he may return in the fall.

Chapter 44: Shifting Light

After the banquet, there is a reception at Uncle Max's and Aunt Sandy's. Later, Dinnie hears from her parents again: they are moving to Bybanks, Kentucky, where her aunts live and where Dinnie was born. Her father says it's a great opportunity! Dinnie prepares to leave, thinking how much she loves Switzerland.

Chapter 45: Ciao

All the students attend the commencement ceremony, then there are numerous leave-takings. Guthrie gives Dinnie a present (a book of drawings), kisses her, and vows that they will all have a reunion. Finally, everyone is gone except Dinnie. She goes home and falls asleep, awaking to the phone's ring. It is Guthrie: he's missed his flight and wants her to come up to Zurich right now. However, both realize this is impractical. They hang up, and Dinnie remains at home, feeling pitiful. However, they have exchanged addresses and phone numbers, and Guthrie vows they will see each other again.

Chapter 46: Next Life

Uncle Max and Aunt Sandy accompany Dinnie to Zurich

so she can catch the plane back to the States; they give her presents and mementos from her school year in Switzerland. She has left her skis in the closet of her room at the school—a hint she may return in the fall. As she prepares for her summer in Kentucky, she reflects that it is a new opportunity—a new life.

Bloomability Timeline

Birth to age 13 Dinnie Doone's "first life" is a chaotic, nomadic existence as she moves from place to place with her mother, older brother, and older sister, following their father from one "opportunity" to another.

Age 13 Dinnie's "first life" ends and "second life" begins when the family moves to New Mexico, big brother Crick goes to jail, big sister Stella marries and has a baby at 16, and Dinnie gets the chance to accompany her Aunt Stella and Uncle Max for a year in Switzerland, where Uncle Max is the new headmaster of an American school.

School year in Switzerland Dinnie meets new friends, has new experiences, learns Italian, finds herself, comes to terms with her wacky family and her place in it, and discovers a world full of "bloomability"—possibility.

End of school Dinnie returns to America to spend the summer in Kentucky with her extended family. She may return to Switzerland in the fall, or she may stay in America. Either way, she is now looking forward to her "new life."

Biographical Sketch

Sharon Creech was born July 29, 1945, in Cleveland, Ohio. She grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland as part of "a big, noisy family . . . with hordes of relatives telling stories around the kitchen table." She spent much of her summers near Quincy, Kentucky, where her extended family lived. "I learned to exaggerate and embellish, because if you didn't, your story was drowned out by someone else's more exciting one." Quincy was a special place to her and would later become the fictitious Bybanks,



Kentucky, mentioned in several of her novels. She was the second oldest daughter in a large family. She had one older sister, three younger brothers, and a multitude of cousins, aunts, and uncles, as well as grandparents. Although Creech does not consciously model her characters after her family members, she finds later that they have many similarities.

Creech received her B.A. from Hiram College in Ohio and her M.A. from George Mason University in Washington, D.C. During graduate school, she worked at the Federal Theater Project Archives and longed to write plays. Then she worked at *Congressional Quarterly* as an editorial assistant, a job she did not enjoy. During her time in Washington, she married, had two children, and divorced. In 1979 she obtained a job in England teaching literature. Upon her arrival, Creech met Lyle D. Rigg, the assistant headmaster of the school, and three years later they married. Soon after they married, they were transferred to the TASIS branch in Switzerland. In 1984, Rigg was reassigned to Thorpe as headmaster of the English branch of TASIS, and he and Creech lived there until 1994. For many years Sharon Creech devoted the vast majority of her time to her teaching and her family. In 1980, her father had a stroke. He lived for six more years but was unable to speak. Creech thought of all the words that were locked up within him. She started her first novel one month after his death in 1986. She has said, "and when I finished it, I wrote another, and another, and another. The words rushed out."

Creech feels she learned most about writing from being a teacher, exploring good literature with students. Her experience as a teacher taught her to appreciate people as individuals. This is evident in her characters, many of whom are enjoyably eccentric. She said, "I particularly enjoy eccentric people and cultivate them as my friends because they add a bit of zing, sort of show you how to look at the world in a different way."

Sharon Creech's first book for young readers, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, was published in England in 1990. She won the Newbery Medal in 1995 for *Walk Two Moons*. After spending eighteen years teaching and writing in Europe, Sharon Creech and her husband have returned to the U.S. and settled in New Jersey.

Critic's Corner

Since winning the Newbery Medal for *Walk Two Moons*, Sharon Creech has become a popular adolescent writer. The reviews for *Bloomability* were mostly positive, par-

ticularly for strong characterization. The negative comments dealt with questions posed, then left unanswered. According to Peg Solonika of *School Library Journal*, "This honest hopeful slice of adolescent life successfully explores how Domenica Santolina Doone, known as Dinnie, comes to terms with her past and establishes a secure identity for the future. Creech's skill at character development and subtle, effective use of metaphor shine in this first-person narrative with crisp, appropriately titled chapters." *Publishers Weekly* said, "Creech makes use of a light first-person narrative and some insightful dream flashes to convey an uprooted 13-year-old's coming of age." John Peters of *Booklist* was even more positive. "As is her wont, Creech sends readers along on a thoughtful young character's life-changing odyssey. ... As if fresh, smart characters in a picturesque setting weren't engaging enough, Creech also poses an array of knotty questions, both personal and philosophical. ... A story to stimulate both head and heart: wise, witty, and worth the money."

Bloomability won several awards. Among these are: IRA/CBC Children's Choices 1999, Parenting Magazine Reading Magic Award 1998, Chicago Public Library Best Books 1998, 2001 Blue Spruce Award Masterlist YA Cat., 2000-2001 Young Hoosier Book Award Masterlist (Grades 6-8), Pacific NW Library Assoc. 2001 Young Reader's Choice Award Masterlist, and 2000-2001 South Carolina Book Award Masterlist (Grades 6-9), Young Adult's Choices for 2000 (IRA).

Other Books by Sharon Creech

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:

Absolutely Normal Chaos (1990)

Walk Two Moons (1994)

Pleasing the Ghost (1996)

Chasing Redbird (1997)

The Wanderer (2000)

Fishing in the Air (2000)

A Fine, Fine School (2001)

"Love That Dog": Learning about Poetry from Miss

Stretchberry (2001)

Ruby Holler (2001)

OTHER:

The Recital (1990) (under the name Sharon Rigg)

Nickel Malley (1991) (under the name Sharon Rigg)

The Center of the Universe: Waiting for the Girl (2002) (play)

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Sime, Richard and Laura Mongello, eds. *Elements of Literature*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2000, pp. 705-718.

"Sharon Creech." *Literature Resource Center - Author Resource Pages*. Gale Group. Online 15 May 2003.
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"Sharon Creech." *Student Resource Center - Biography Display*. Gale Group. Online 15 May 2003.
</galenet.com/servlet/SRC/>

"Sharon Creech Official Site," www.sharoncreech.com
"Sharon Creech biography,"
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharon_Creech.

General Objectives

1. to discuss the difficulties of going to a new school
2. to identify and evaluate characters' traits and motivations
3. to compare and contrast characters in the work
4. to understand how childhood experiences shape our lives
5. to discuss how different people react differently to similar situations
6. to discuss self-protection mechanisms
7. to evaluate the relationships between the characters

Specific Objectives

1. to discuss the problems Dinnie faced as the new kid at school
2. to compare and contrast Crick's and Stella's handling of moving from place to place
3. to discuss why Dinnie's parents sent her to Switzerland
4. to analyze the relationship between Aunt Grace and Aunt Tillie
5. to understand why Dinnie felt like "a dot in a bubble."
6. to discuss Guthrie's philosophy of living

Literary Terms and Applications

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

Character: a person or an animal in a story, a play, or another literary work. Characters can be classified according to the changes they undergo. A *static character* does not change much in the course of a work. Uncle Max is a static character. A *dynamic character* changes as a result of events in the story. Dinnie is a dynamic character because of the way she matures and gains self confidence.

Characterization: the way a writer reveals the person-

ality of a character. The writer may simply tell the reader that a character is honest or trustworthy or shy or unhappy. This method is called *direct*

• *characterization*. Usually writers use *indirect characterization* which reveals a character's personality in one of these ways:

• *the words of the character*. For instance, on pp. 66-67: "When Lila found out that she, like all the rest of us, had to do four hours of community service each week, Lila said, 'This is slave labor. My parents aren't paying all this money for me to work for you.'"

• *the actions of the character*. For example, on p. 66: "The following Monday, Lila stormed out of Uncle Max's office and skipped the rest of her classes. She phoned her parents, she phoned Uncle Max at home at night, she threw Belen's clothes on the floor and she hounded her dorm resident."

• *the comments made about the character by other characters in the story*. For example, on p. 68: "People asked me how I could stand her and why I was her friend."

• *the way other characters in the story react to the character*. For example, on p. 67: "Other students called her a spoiled brat behind her back, and they stayed clear of her. When her name was mentioned at our house, Uncle Max rubbed his forehead, and Aunt Sandy would say, 'What's that girl up to now?'"

Anecdote: a brief story told to illustrate a point. An example is on page 27, when Guthrie tells Dinnie the story of the two prisoners—one looked down and saw only dirt, the other looked up and saw only sky. The point is that your experience is determined by your focus—regardless of the circumstances, perspective makes the difference.

Bildungsroman: a coming-of-age story (the word means "novel of self-cultivation" in German), focusing on the main character's spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development and growth, usually from childhood to maturity. Bloomability is the story of Dinnie's growing beyond the limitations and constraints of her chaotic childhood and unstable family life ("first life"), to embrace a sense of herself as a distinct person who can make her own choices and form new connections.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Nina Bawden, *The Outside Child*

Sandra Belton, *McKendree*

Ellen Conford, *Dear Mom, Get Me Out of Here!*

Sharon Creech, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*

Sarah Dessen, *Keeping the Moon*

David Gifaldi, *Toby Scudder, Ultimate Warrior*

Constance C. Greene, *Monday I Love You*

Patricia Hermes, *A Place for Jeremy*
Lauren Lee, *Stella: On the Edge of Popularity*
Susan Richards Shreve, *Blister*
Barbara Kennedy, *The Boy Who Loved Alligators*
Claudia Mills, *Hannah on her Way*
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *Alice Alone*
Susan Wojciechowski, *And the Other, Gold*

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central themes and situations in *Bloomability* should include these aspects.

Themes

- sibling relationships
- friendships
- coping with change
- loneliness
- prejudice
- education
- self-protection
- self-confidence
- inclusion

Motifs

- dealing with the difficulties of leaving home
- how we insulate ourselves from threatening situations
- how we react to others of different nationalities
- how we forge friendships with a variety of people
- the importance of having close friends
- that there is more to education than classroom instruction
- the importance of feeling that you matter

Meaning Study

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

1. "I was still pretty much in bubble mode. It seemed that all around me was a smooth bubble, clear enough to see through, but strong enough to keep me inside. It was like a huge transparent beach ball. I imagined pores in this bubble ball that could let in streams of things from the outside, so I could examine them and poke them back out again if I didn't like them. (p. 10)
(Dinnie has difficulty dealing with being taken from her home and her family, so she imagines a bubble as a form of self-protection. The "bubble mode" concept is a reaction to the feeling that she has no control over her life or what is happening to her.)

2. "There were two prisoners in a jail cell. They each looked out the same small window. One prisoner said, 'Man oh man, what a lot of dirt!' The other said, 'Man oh man, what a lot of sky!'" (p. 27)
(Guthrie's anecdote illustrates that a person's focus determines his experience; one can choose to be an optimist or a pessimist. Guthrie chooses to be an optimist, looking on the positive side of everything.)
3. And I would walk the streets where my grandma had walked, and I'd go into the house where she had lived, and I'd be home. (p. 54)
(Dinnie's rootless upbringing has left her longing for a real home, and for a while, she thinks that home can be found in the Italian village from which her grandparents immigrated to America. Later in the story, she realizes that she takes "home" with her wherever she goes, but at this point, she is still looking for a place to give her a sense of belonging.)
4. And then I thought about Lila's cursing father and her mother dashing off to the States, and I felt a sharp, sudden sympathy for Lila, and a flood of affection for my own parents with their zany style, their nomadic existence, and even their quirky forgetfulness. (p. 227)
(Dinnie has had very little communication from her family since she arrived in Switzerland. Already insecure about her family, she tends to think other people's family lives are better than hers. Lila's parents' behavior in the wake of Lila and Guthrie's accident shows Dinnie that she's relatively fortunate to have the parents she does.)
5. "'Look at us!' Guthrie said. 'Here we are, back in the woods, facing more forking roads. Where are we all going? How will we all meet up together again?'" (p. 253)
(During his speech at commencement, Guthrie expresses his personal belief that all the students are at the school because of choices they have made. He believes these choices have made all the difference; students, he says, will continue to affect each other's lives—they will take pieces of each other and of the American school in Switzerland wherever they go.)

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 1-4 (Literal Level)

1. What are the first things you learn about Dinnie and her family?
(At the beginning of the book, Dinnie lives with her mother, father, and older brother and sister, Crick and Stella. She has lived in a dozen places in as many years, and has only one box of possessions to her name. Her mother is from New York City and is trained as an artist; her father is a jack-of-all-trades country boy from Kentucky. His unwillingness or inability to hold down a job, coupled with her family's disapproval of their nomadic lifestyle, ensures that the children grow up rootless and isolated.)

2. What is Uncle Max's job? How does it affect Dinnie?
(Uncle Max has just become Headmaster of the American school in Switzerland. His position makes it possible for Dinnie to attend the school even though her parents could not afford to send her there on their own. Free tuition for family members is one of the "perks" of his employment.)

3. How are Guthrie and Lila caught in the avalanche?
(Lila is leading a group of skiers when she falls. Guthrie waits for her, but the others kept going. When she gets up, she wants to go farther off the main run; Guthrie protests, but follows her anyway. Subsequently, there is an avalanche, which they try to outrun, but they are overtaken when Lila falls again and Guthrie stops for her.)

4. How do Lila's parents react when Aunt Sandy asks them to come to Milan, where Lila is hospitalized?
(They are hostile and selfish. Her dad swears and blames the school, but refuses to come for supposed business reasons. Her mother is resentful of the inconvenience, insists on the school paying for her plane ticket, and criticizes and complains the whole times she is in Milan, making her daughter miserable and alienating everyone.)

Questions 5-7 (Interpretative Level)

5. How does the relationship between Dinnie and Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max change throughout the book?
(At the beginning of the book, Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max are very kind but a bit distant; by the end of the book, they have truly become family, with a bond of love and shared experience.)

6. How does spending time with Guthrie start to change Dinnie?

(When Dinnie arrives in Switzerland, she is in her self-protective bubble and is unhappy to have been "kidnapped"; she sees the glass as half-empty, and herself as a victim of circumstances. The optimistic Guthrie teaches Dinnie to enjoy life and actively participate in it. He helps her see herself as an interesting person, distinct from her family. He teaches her to enjoy the beauty, excitement, and adventure life has to offer.)

7. Why does Lila behave the way she does?
(Lila is always either too "up" or too negative—excessively enthusiastic and bitterly complaining by turns, without any balance. Aunt Sandy indicates that her behavior is due to family problems. The interaction with Lila's parents after the accident suggests that Lila's bad behavior is modeled on that of her parents.)

Questions 8-10 (Critical Level)

8. How does Dinnie cope with being taken to Switzerland to attend yet another new school?
(As Dinnie is leaving her home in New Mexico, she retreats into "bubble mode" as a way of protecting herself from further hurt and disappointment. She feels insignificant and victimized, so she imagines herself in a protected environment where she can observe what is happening around her without really being a part of it. It isn't so much a new school that is the big adjustment, it is being apart from her family.)

9. How does Dinnie finally get rid of her bubble?
(As Dinnie adjusts to her new situation, makes new friends, learns new things, and feels more comfortable, her bubble gets thinner and thinner. When she finally has the self-confidence not to need the protection the bubble offers, it goes away. This gives Dinnie a sense of adventure and freedom.)

10. How does Dinnie's opinion of her parents change after Aunt Sandy contacts Lila's parents?
(Dinnie she realizes that her parents, despite the fact they are not "normal," love her and want the best for her; she feels gratitude toward her family, and pity for Lila, whose own parents are horrible.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Write a series of letters from Dinnie to one of her friends in New Mexico, explaining how she was able to meet new people and make friends in Switzerland.

12. Make a Venn diagram showing how Guthrie's life is similar to and different from Lila's.

Across the Curriculum

Art and Music

1. Draw three pictures for the book. Explain where they fit in the story.
2. Draw and paint a mural of the important events in the novel.
3. Find songs that relate to the moods and themes of the novel. Bring them to class and share with your class how each song relates to the novel.
4. Learn an Italian folk song.

History and Social Studies

1. Research Switzerland and share your information with your classmates. Determine the landmass size, population, average summer temperature, average winter temperature, popular pastimes, holiday traditions, common occupations, natural resources, etc.
2. On a map, label the four tallest mountains in Switzerland. Be sure to include their elevation. Label Zurich.

Math

1. Determine the distance from Washington, D.C., to Zurich, Switzerland.
2. If the flight from Washington D.C. to Zurich took 10 hours, what was the average speed of the plane?
3. If the flight from Washington D.C. to Zurich took 12 hours, what was the average speed of the plane?

Language Arts

1. Choose three things from the novel and tell what they symbolize.
2. Make a character list and tell if the characters are static or dynamic.
3. Use the character list and explain which characters are round, flat, or stereotypes.
4. Write another story Guthrie could have told to Dinnie to make his point about optimism and pessimism.

5. Choose what you see as the major turning point in Dinnie's life. Write a paper explaining why this one thing is more important than any other.

Science

1. Research avalanches and report your findings to your class. Be sure to include 'causes,' frequency, preventions, and methods of rescue.
2. Determine the latitude and longitude measurements of Zurich, Switzerland.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Write a series of letters from Dinnie to Stella explaining what she learned during the school year in Switzerland. Include at least three important lessons.
2. Create a mural that shows the major events of Dinnie's life.
3. Explain the novel's theme or message.
4. Discuss in small groups the lessons you can take from Dinnie's life and apply to your own.

Alternative Assessment

1. Make a character list and describe each character.
2. Retell, in summary, the main events of the book in chronological order.
3. Compile a list of important lessons Dinnie learns while in Switzerland
4. Explain, in your own words, how Dinnie gains self-confidence during her time in Switzerland.

Vocabulary Test

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

- A. feeling
- B. change
- C. signs
- D. confined
- E. loud
- F. went with
- G. wanderer
- H. possibilities
- I. shortened
- J. excitement
- K. not as good
- L. muddled
- M. different
- N. give up
- O. feeling sorry
- P. without exception
- Q. talk fast without meaning
- R. without direction
- S. urge to do wrong
- T. angry outbursts

1. "No! I won't adjust! I won't **adapt!** I won't! I'll rebel!"
2. I would have laughed with her, but I was sure that my own laugh would sound **inferior** in comparison.
3. He reminded me a little of my father, the way he bounded around, full of **enthusiasm**.
4. Sometimes from the hall, we could hear Guthrie laugh his **booming** laugh.
5. If Lila were coming down the walk, someone would **inevitably** mutter, "Here comes the witch."
6. I wasn't the only **nomad** here. Lots of people were nomads.
7. It was easy for students at the American school to refuse **temptations** after one student was expelled.
8. He **mangled** English, but the words he substituted were often better than the right ones.
9. If you didn't like the people, you might not like being **cooped** up with them for two weeks.
10. I liked the **abbreviated** academic classes in the morning.
11. I Was thinking in Italian while I was watching my dream-self **jabber**.
12. Would you **sacrifice** food if someone else was hungry?
13. She waved **vaguely** at the air. "Oh, up there somewhere," she said.

14. I had a weird **sensation**, as if the wall of my bubble was so thin, that the outside was coming in and the inside was going out.
15. "Well, doesn't it seem like she gets an awful lot of attention throwing these **tantrums?**"
16. I was **regretting** my observation to Guthrie about Lila's behavior.
17. I felt as if these were good **omens**, and maybe they meant that Guthrie would be found and he would be alive.
18. A policeman **accompanied** Signora Palermo in a third helicopter.
19. He gave examples of how **varied** we all looked and spoke and acted.
20. "We haven't been filling you full of all of these **bloomabilities** so that you might follow."

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

- A. Dinnie
- B. Guthrie
- C. Lila
- D. Stella
- E. Keisuke
- F. Belen
- G. Uncle Max
- H. Aunt Sandy
- I. Grandma Fiorelli
- J. Aunt Tillie

- 1. grew up in Campobasso, Italy
- 2. has a baby in New Mexico
- 3. calls Lila's and Guthrie's parents when they are injured
- 4. Is taken back to the States after the avalanche
- 5. feels like a dot in a bubble
- 6. sings a Spanish song of friendship at the end-of-school luncheon
- 7. is headmaster of the American school in Switzerland
- 8. makes up new English words when unsure of the correct words
- 9. tells Dinnie a story about two prisoners
- 10. is a champion cheesecake jello maker

Part II: Fill-in-the-Blank (20 points)

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

- 1. Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max give Dinnie _____ for Christmas.
- 2. Dinnie struggles with learning to speak _____.
- 3. Crick joins _____.
- 4. Dinnie's mom sends her a _____ for Christmas.
- 5. Classmates call Lila the _____ because of her vocal complaints.
- 6. Dinnie has a crush on _____.
- 7. Dinnie thinks having _____ in her life will make her interesting.
- 8. Aunt Sandy and Dinnie learn that _____ does not have a mother.
- 9. When Dinnie and Guthrie go to the top of Mt. San Salvatore, she feels _____.
- 10. At the end-of-school luncheon, _____ reads a poem by Robert Frost about a road less traveled.

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase in the parenthesis that makes the statement correct.

- 1. (**Guthrie, Dinnie**) is a strong skier
- 2. Dinnie goes to (**Switzerland, Italy**) to live with Uncle Max and Aunt Sandy.
- 3. Dinnie has (**one box, three trunks**) of things to move.
- 4. Grandma Fiorelli lived in (**Italy, Germany**) before moving to America.
- 5. Dinnie sends her family (**photographs, money**) for Christmas.
- 6. (**Lila, Keisuke**) complains about a roommate, food, and sports class.
- 7. (**Lila's, Guthrie's**) dad refuses to go to Milan because he has Important Business.
- 8. (**Belen, Dinnie**) has a crush on Keisuke.
- 9. (**Lila, Belen**) sings a Spanish song of friendship.

10. (**Dinnie, Lila**) learns to appreciate her zany family.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Lila and Dinnie.
2. Explain three lessons of life Dinnie learns while living with Uncle Max and Aunt Sandy.
3. What do you think Dinnie's relationship with her parents will be when she returns to the States? Justify your answer.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

- A. Dinnie
- B. Guthrie
- C. Lila
- D. Stella
- E. Keisuke
- F. Belen
- G. Uncle Max
- H. Aunt Sandy
- I. Grandma Fiorelli
- J. Aunt Tillie

- 1. is called "the Pistol"
- 2. likes to fish
- 3. makes up the word "bloomability"
- 4. works for the American school in Switzerland
- 5. is Dinnie's sister
- 6. likes Keisuke more than her parents want her to
- 7. is always enthusiastic about life
- 8. sends Dinnie a red scarf for Christmas
- 9. wishes Dinnie could stay with her in Switzerland when school is over
- 10. write postcards to Dinnie about food and fishing

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

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

- 1. Dinnie's family moves from town to town because _____.
- 2. Dinnie is able to attend the American school in Switzerland because _____.
- 3. Keisuke makes up new English words because _____.
- 4. Guthrie shouts *libero* to _____.
- 5. Dinnie wants to visit Campobassa, Italy, because _____.
- 6. Guthrie is injured when _____.
- 7. Lila's father doesn't go to the hospital in Milan because _____.
- 8. Lila is rescued from the avalanche before Guthrie because _____.
- 9. Dinnie realizes her own parents aren't so bad when _____.
- 10. Dinnie plans to spend the summer in _____.

Part III: True or False (20 points)

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

- _____ 1. Dinnie has lived in the same town all of her life.
- _____ 2. Aunt Sandy and Uncle Max give Dinnie money for Christmas.
- _____ 3. Crick joins the Air Force.
- _____ 4. Dinnie's mom sends her a rod and reel for fishing for Christmas.
- _____ 5. Classmates calls Lila "the Grouch" because of all her complaints.
- _____ 6. Dinnie has a crush on Guthrie.
- _____ 7. Dinnie thinks hiding in her bubble makes her interesting.
- _____ 8. Aunt Sandy and Dinnie find out that Lila doesn't have a mother.
- _____ 9. Guthrie reads a Robert Frost poem about the road less traveled at the end-of-school luncheon.
- _____ 10. Dinnie feels free when she and Guthrie looks down from the top of Mt. San Salvatore.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Tell the events that change Dinnie and describe the effect each of these things has on her.
2. Why is going to Switzerland a good experience for Dinnie?
3. Explain why Dinnie and Guthrie become such good friends.
4. Analyze Dinnie's relationship with her family prior to going to Switzerland, and predict how they will be the same or different when she returns.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

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

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Fill-in-the-Blank (20 points)

1. new skis
2. Italian
3. the Air Force
4. photo album
5. Pistol
6. Guthrie
7. struggles
8. Guthrie
9. free
10. Guthrie

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

1. Guthrie
2. Switzerland

3. one box
4. Italy
5. photographs
6. Lila
7. Lila's
8. Belen
9. Belen
10. Dinnie

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

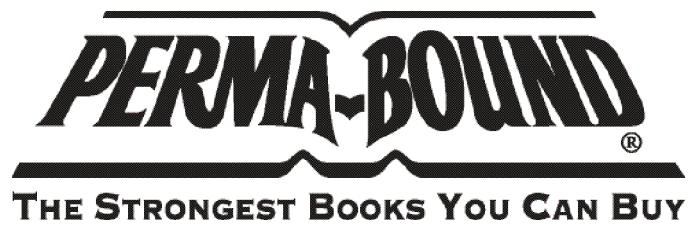
1. her father finds new "opportunities"
2. her uncle is the headmaster
3. he doesn't always know the correct word
4. show his excitement at just being alive
5. her grandparents lived there
6. he is caught in an avalanche
7. he has Important Business
8. she was wearing a transmitter
9. she hears how Lila's parents reacted to Aunt Sandy's request for them to come to Milan
10. Bybanks, Kentucky with her family

Part III: True or False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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