

## BRIAN'S SONG

# LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

WILLIAM BLINN

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

*This guide was prepared using the Bantam Books edition, © 1972. Other editions may differ.*

### SYNOPSIS (by scene)

**Fade In:** Set in the Chicago Bears' training camp in the midwest in 1965, the screenplay opens on Gale Sayers, 25-year-old native of Wichita, Kansas, arriving to his first NFL job. Gale encounters Brian Piccolo, 22-year-old rookie from Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Brian recalls their first meeting in June in Buffalo, New York, at the All-America game and teases Gale about his inept verbal expression. Brian suggests that Gale favor Coach George Halas's right ear because he is too vain to admit deafness.

**Direct Cut:** While Halas interviews him, Gale scrambles to stay on Halas's right side to avoid his left ear. Halas asks if he is a competent pass catcher and bristles at his constant movements. Gale realizes that Brian has tricked him into making a fool of himself.

**Direct Cut:** At the coaches' introduction at dinner, Gale sits with blacks and is annoyed when Brian joins them. While J. C. Caroline covers the playbook, curfew, and fines, Gale takes revenge. Brian gets him into trouble for talking during a formal meeting; Caroline fines Gale \$25. When Caroline forces Brian to sing the Wake Forest fight song as punishment, Gale slips mashed potatoes and gravy into the chair, then exits just as Brian sits down.

**Direct Cut:** Daily scrimmage begins with players harnessed to a stone wall and Abe Gibron yelling for them to pull it down. Halas is pleased with Gale's time. Brian pretends to force Gale into overconfidence.

**Hard Cut:** At a called meeting, the rookies take notes on a play diagram on the blackboard. From the expression on Halas's face, they expect the worst.

**Hard Cut:** In scrimmage with the Montreal Alouettes, Brian angers Gibron by failing to screen right on a fake draw. Brian makes a joke about his assignment. Gale smiles at Brian's good humor.

**Direct Cut:** Gale walks by as Brian practices with an imaginary ball. Brian admits that he is not very good at the halfback option. Gale encourages him. Brian pretends to envy Gale, who cost the team too much money for them to fire him. Brian admits that he tries to humor Gale; Gale admits that jokes are not his style.

**Hard Cut:** Because they play the same team position, McCaskey wants Brian with Gale. Halas questions Gale, whom racists will taunt.

**Direct Cut:** In the dormitory, Brian arrives as Gale listens to the radio. Brian insists that they wouldn't be assigned a room if they hadn't made the team. On their way for Brian to call home, they pass Atkins, O'Bradovich, and Evey. Atkins welcomes them to the team; the victims race down the corridor to avoid being hazed with a mix of honey, cereal, sand, and catsup.

**Cut:** In the Bears' locker room, two reporters question

Gale while Brian strips out of his jersey. Gale refrains from bragging about his first game or sounding too expert on the basis of one success. Brian interrupts and makes up quotations for Gale. To a question about biracial roommates, Brian jokes that there are no problems so long as Gale doesn't use the bathroom.

**Direct Cut:** To Brian's question about how he runs, Gale claims not to think about it. Brian pretends to be jealous.

**Direct Cut:** The two players and their wives, Joy Piccolo and Linda Sayers, relax at a pizza parlor. Brian tells funny stories; Gale remains quiet. Brian describes being set up for the second trap play in a row against the Los Angeles Rams. To Linda's surprise, Gale makes a racial joke. Brian congratulates "the Great Stone Face from Kansas."

**Direct Cut:** At the Los Angeles Coliseum, Brian reads a racist letter that accuses him of rooming with a "darker" and ends, "Love, Mother." Gale plays so well that Brian offers to write his speech for "Rookie of the Year."

**Direct Cut:** Gale wins the award, but is petrified of speaking in public. He fails miserably to recite Brian's prepared speech.

**Direct Cut:** That evening at the Sayers' front porch, Brian indicates his concern about playing second string and his intent to be traded. To improve his chances, Brian wants to compete for Gale's position as fullback. Gale, holding his trophy, is neither worried nor angry.

**Direct Cut:** In Halas's office, a new team photo goes up. The second year of their relationship, the team assembles for timed wind sprints. Gale joins Brian, who is excited that Joy is pregnant. Brian plans to name the child "Spade Piccolo." Brian wins the competition by three seconds. Gibron notes that Brian is out to get Gale.

**Direct Cut:** In the dormitory, Brian ridicules bigotry by poking fun at his own "wop" ancestry, symbolized by a large pizza. When Caroline posts the starting lineup, Gale maintains his position. Brian is disappointed.

**Direct Cut:** During a game with the 49ers at Wrigley Field, Gale plays more than Brian. Joy celebrates their win, but worries that Brian is despondent. Brian, Joy, and Linda look on in horror when a 49er injures Gale's knee.

**Hard Cut:** Linda drives Gale home from the hospital, where he hunches over two canes and refuses lunch. He hears Brian singing the Wake Forest fight song in the basement as he sets up a leg-lift machine to rehabilitate Gale's knee. To motivate his friend, Brian explains how he fought his way to the top in college ball. In the pros, he is still competitive, but he will not "take the job from a cripple." Gale tentatively touches the machine.

**Direct Cut:** As Gale walks in a city park, he hears by radio that Brian wins the game ball from the Rams. Gale, somewhat threatened, chucks his cane in the trash. Brian confers with Dr. Fox, who indicates that some people give up rather than fight. Brian presses Gale to increase his leglifts.

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In frustration, Brian whips Gale into shape by calling him nigger. Gale considers calling Brian a wop. The two laugh at their silliness. They work up to a brisk jog over hurdles and slopes. Gale falls, but completes the run.

**Hard Cut:** Returned once more to pro ball, the two practice together. Their mutual assistance does not escape the attention of Halas, who promotes Brian to fullback.

**Direct Cut:** In the locker room, Brian faces his own challenge as he loses weight and speed. He jokes, but Gale worries in silence.

**Direct Cut:** During a game, Brian blames allergy to pollen for his severe winding, yet claims that Fox's medication doesn't help. Halas tells Gale that he must replace Brian.

**Direct Cut:** Halas sends Brian back to Chicago. At the hotel, Brian packs while Gale keeps quiet. Brian reports that Gibron's lecture blamed marital problems for the poor start. He quips that he's pregnant.

**Direct Cut:** At Baltimore Memorial Stadium, a trainer tapes Gale's ankle. McCaskey and Halas inform Gale that the doctor will remove cancer from Brian's right lung the next day. Gale fights tears while revealing the diagnosis to the team. He asks them to dedicate the game ball to "Pic."

**Direct Cut:** After surgery, Brian joshes Gale for letting the Colts win. Gale, Caroline, Jack Concannon, and other players gorge on pepperoni pizza and beer while visiting Brian. He offers to display his scar. A nurse ejects the players. Before the Sayers leave, he asks them to visit a little girl who had an operation.

**Direct Cut:** At the nurses' station of the children's ward, Joy and Gale offer an autograph for Patti Lucas. The nurse reports that the child died that morning.

**Full Shot:** On the hospital lawn, Brian rejoices that Gale's knee has healed. To Joy, Brian longs to return to the Bears as a kicker. Joy is dubious. He insists that surgery will not deter him. In his room, he telephones Gale's hotel room and asks him to cheer up Joy.

**Direct Cut:** A hotel official tells Gale that Brian's tumor is not gone.

**Direct Cut:** In the Piccolo living room at 3:30 A. M., Joy thanks the Sayers for flying back to ask about Brian's condition, of which he knows nothing. Joy begs Gale to be at the hospital when Brian gets the bad news.

**Direct Cut:** While Brian and Gale play a board game, Mr. Eberle, a lab technician, asks Brian to sign a surgical consent form. Eberle realizes that the surgeon has not prepared him for more surgery. When Gale informs Brian of another tumor, he refuses to sign. Gale begs Eberle for a reprieve until Monday morning.

**Cut to Black:** As a nurse prepares Brian for surgery, he jokes about being "put to sleep."

**Cut to:** At a banquet hall, Gale accepts the George S. Halas Award for Most Courageous Player, then awards the trophy to Brian, whose opponent is cancer. He asks players to pray for his friend.

**Direct Cut:** Linda urges Gale to hurry to the hospital. While McCaskey clutches a rosary, the two teammates visit for the last time. Brian thanks Gale for helping him improve his running. After the Sayers leave, Brian embraces Joy.

**Dissolve To:** From the parking lot, Gale sees McCaskey close the blinds after Brian dies.

### TIME LINE

**1920** Halas plays his first professional game with the

Decatur Staleys.

**1922** The Decatur Staleys become the Chicago Bears.

**1940** Gale Sayers is born in Wichita, Kansas.

**1943** Brian Piccolo is born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

**1950s** late Brian enters Wake Forest University.

**1965** June Brian and Gale meet in Buffalo, New York, at an All-American game.

**fall training camp** Gale arrives at the midwestern training camp for the Chicago Bears, where Brian recognizes him.

**fall practice** Coach Hallas advises Gale and Brian about the racial implications of rooming together.

**end of season** Gale wins the "Rookie of the Year" award.

**that evening** Brian plans to compete for the position as fullback.

**1966-70 second season** Gale maintains his position in the starting lineup for the first exhibition game.

**game with 49ers at Wrigley Field** Gale's knee is broken.

**later in the season** Brian helps Gale rehabilitate his knee. Brian begins to lose weight and speed.

Coach Halas sends him to Chicago for a physical examination.

**before a game** Gale tells his teammates about Brian's illness and asks them to win for him. They lose to the Colts 24-21.

**first surgery** Brian meets Patti Lucas and asks Gale to give her an autograph. Brian has part of his lung removed.

**later that day** Teammates and family visit Brian for a beer and pizza party. Gale learns that Patti died that morning.

**subsequent day at 3:30 a. m.** Gale and Linda fly to Chicago to confer with Joy about Brian's condition.

**subsequent weekend** Brian hears from Mr. Eberle that the doctor plans more surgery that weekend.

Gale insists that Brian have the weekend to prepare.

**Monday** Brian is taken to the operating room.

**subsequent night** Gale receives the George S. Halas Award for Most Courageous Player and dedicates it to Brian.

**Brian's last day** Gale hurries to be with Brian to say goodbye.

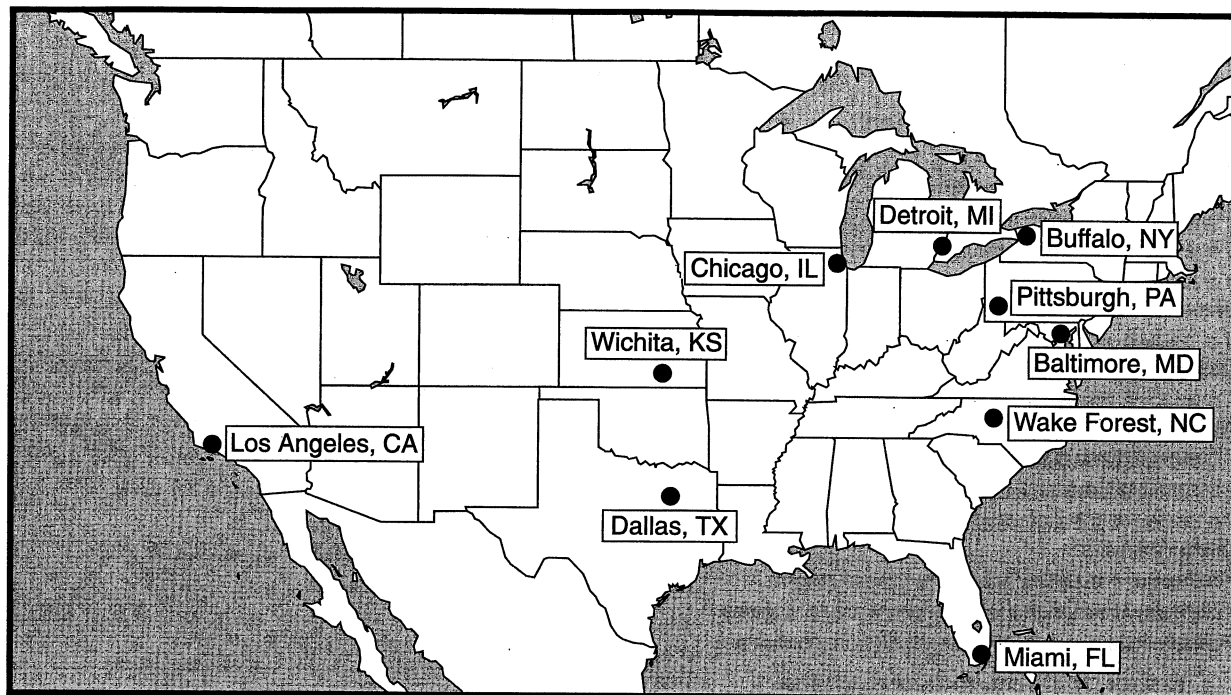
**1971** Nov. 11 *Brian's Song* is the Movie of the Week.

**1972** *Brian's Song* is published in paperback.

### AUTHOR'S LIFE AND WORKS

William Blinn (born 1937), a native of Toledo, Ohio, and resident of Los Angeles, studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York before launching a varied and successful career as a television and movie writer and producer. Blinn distinguished himself through his role in quality series programming, including *Starsky and Hutch*, *Rawhide*, *The Rookies*, *Eight Is Enough*, *Roots*, *The New Land*, *Fame*, and the made-for-TV movie *Brian's Song*, which Blinn adapted from Gale Sayers's *I Am Third*. Blinn has also earned acclaim for producing a feature musical/film, *Purple Rain*, starring Prince, and for masterminding an independent production company, Echo Cove Productions, producer of "The Wonder Years—A Baby Boom Musical Revue." In 1988, Blinn signed with Walt Disney Studios to create, produce,

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and write for Walt Disney Television. This collaboration resulted in the re-creation of three Disney favorites: *The Magical World of Disney*, *The Absent-Minded Professor*, and *Davy Crockett*.

Even though there is scant information in standard library sources about William Blinn's creative contributions, his talents have helped to improve television standards. He has garnered significant awards, notably five Emmies, a Writer's Guild of America award, two NAACP Image Awards, certificate from the President's Council on Mental Retardation, Humanitas Award, 1977 Television Critics Award, ACLU award, San Francisco State University Preceptor Award, two Golden Globe Awards, Film Advisory Board Award of Merit, Peabody Award nomination, and top ratings in the United Kingdom, Europe, Scandinavia, Australia, and New Zealand.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

William Blinn's screenplay featuring the friendship that travels from a midwestern training camp to a dormitory in Chicago to a series of NFL games and back to a hospital room depicts a racial problem common to the 1960s: a black rooming with a white. After Brian Piccolo's death from lung cancer at age 26, the story of his friendship with Gale Sayers became a classic title in young adult biodrama. Although separated by hotel rooms and the demands of NFL football, Gale remained close to his teammate and supported the Piccolo family during Brian's fight with terminal cancer.

*Brian's Song*, an RCA-Columbia picture co-written with Buzz Kulik, is a biography of the friendship and competition between teammates Gale Sayers (1940- ) and Brian Piccolo (1943-1970). The film earned high ratings at its debut on

November 11, 1971, on ABC-TV as "Movie of the Week." It was immediately classed among other "buddy" movies, e. g., *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Sting*. Starring James Caan as Brian and Billy Dee Williams as Gale, the film features Jack Warden as coach, Judy Pace and Shelley Fabares as the players' wives, and numerous football players appearing as themselves. Michel Legrand provided the poignant score. Because of its sincerity and appeal, the film helped boost the career of James Caan, who followed with a role in *The Godfather*, and of Billie Dee Williams, whose next film, *Lady Sings the Blues*, helped make his name as a handsome, voluble leading man.

*Brian's Song* received the George Foster Peabody Award, Director's Guild of America Award, Writer's Guild of America Award, Eddie nomination by the American Cinema Editors, Golden Globe Award nomination, Golden Reel Award nomination, and an Emmy. The movie's humanitarian themes earned praise from the National Conference of Christian and Jews, *Black Sports* magazine, Congressional Record, American Cancer Society, and NAACP. Since its publication in 1972, the play has become a classic young adult drama.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To characterize movies for television
2. To contrast obstacles to accomplishment
3. To summarize the work of a professional football player
4. To account for competition among friends
5. To outline styles of humor and wit
6. To characterize various types of courage
7. To note the value of camera angles to a screenplay
8. To isolate moments that alleviate tension

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9. To elucidate examples of racial stereotyping
10. To enumerate examples of brotherhood
11. To analyze the theme of team before self
12. To characterize masculine methods of expressing grief and loss

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To recount Gale's recovery
2. To discuss racism in the 1960s
3. To explain how Gale learns to speak in public
4. To account for Brian's refusal of surgery on the weekend
5. To describe the significance of the game ball and trophies
6. To evaluate the coach's response to Brian's failing health
7. To analyze the role of the Bears and George S. Halas in NFL history
8. To assess Gale's sensitivity and compassion
9. To contrast Gale and Brian as competitors
10. To consider the balance of Gale's recovery and Brian's terminal illness
11. To discuss the author's attitude toward racism
12. To list ways in which the team prepares for a season
13. To define Gale's role in affirming Brian's confidence

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of William Blinn's made-for-TV narrative style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**allusion** a reference to a work of art, landmark, historical event, or text that most people recognize from a few clues. Brian labels Gale's trophy a "Maltese Falcon," the focal item in a thriller movie by the same name. Later, a nurse smiles "Cheshirely," a reference to the disappearing cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* who fades from sight leaving his disembodied smile in the air.

**black humor** a macabre joke or intensely serious comedy about a situation that usually elicits gravity, fear, or grief. Brian Piccolo makes a feeble jest on being "put to sleep," which suggests the euphemism that describes euthanizing a pet. The allusion to Martin Bormann calls to mind the Nazi official sometimes called Hitler's "Evil Genius" for atrocities against defenseless prisoners in death camps.

**quip** a brief rejoinder, riposte, or zany one-liner that introduces razor-sharp comedy to an otherwise humorless scene. As Nurse Furman challenges Brian at his door, he retreats, pretending that "white lisle stockings turn [him] on." A similar quip connects negro blood with a desire for chitlins, a stereotype in racist humor.

**symbol** an object, situation, or event that represents or emblemizes something of greater importance, such as patriotism, love, challenge, or fear. In *Brian's Song*, the race to the bridge suggests the bridging of racial differences. At the conclusion, McCaskey closes the hospital room blinds as a gesture of finality, death, and respect.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The urban settings of *Brian's Song* characterize the gypsy life style of professional football players. Although the play centers on Chicago, events take place at big city venues of NFL games, a formal sports banquet, locker rooms, team meetings, coach's office, and a practice field, and mention

planes and hotels to indicate that traveling is central to the life of a sports star. To counter the rootlessness of their schedule, Blinn includes Gale's run in the woods and the walk in the park along with scenes of husbands and wives sharing pizza and Brian introducing Gale to the basement rehabilitation center. However, even though the characters discuss normal family and home responsibilities, the bulk of their dialogue and action refers to professional football.

In the final scenes, Brian's permanent location at the hospital illustrates the end of his mobile life and career and the approach of death. By including a visit to a child's ward, the playwright suggests that no one, young or old, strong or weak, escapes death. The interplay between jolly sports players and sober hospital staff also heightens the tension as Brian must learn to apply his good humor to life-threatening disease. His placement in bed and in a hospital gown heightens his vulnerability, as does his weak reply in a telephone conversation. The closing of blinds to indicate death implies an easy passing from life to death. Gale's grief carries the milieu back to the playing field, where he must learn to cope with the loss of a teammate and friend.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about character, cancer, racism, grief, football, sports heroes, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

*Acting on Your Values*, Rosen Publishing Group  
*The Best There Ever Was*, Gridiron Football  
*Black Olympian Medalists*, Libraries Unlimited  
*Characters in Crisis*, Center for Humanities  
*Chicago Bears*, Creative Editions  
*Crossing Barriers: People Who Overcame*, Libraries Unlimited

*Eyes on the Prize*, Social Studies School Services  
*Iron Horse: Lou Gehrig in His Time*, Books on Tape  
*The Longest Yard*, Video Library  
*Magic Johnson*, Recorded Books  
*The Nature of Prejudice*, Social Studies School Services  
*100 Greatest Quarterbacks*, Random House  
*Paper Lion*, Books on Tape  
*Prejudice*, Social Studies School Services  
*Prejudice Is Foul Play*, Social Studies School Services  
*Separate But Equal*, Filmic Archives  
*They Call Me Coach*, Books on Tape  
*Ty Cobb*, Books on Tape

Also, consult these web sites:

"Brian Piccolo," <http://www.wfu.edu/Academic-departments/History/forest/piccolo>.  
"Brian Piccolo's Grave," <http://www.findagrave.com/pictures/piccolobrian.html>.  
"Chicago Bears," <http://www.hofgroup.com/bears22.htm>.  
"Crisis, Grief, and Healing," <http://www.webhealing.com>.  
"George Halas," <http://www.nearlifeart.com/hstamp.htm>.  
"Lung Cancer," <http://oncolink.upenn.edu/pdq160623.html>.  
"Lung Cancer," <http://www.erinet.com/nadoc/lung.htm>.  
"Papa Bear' George Halas," <http://www.usps.gov/news/stamps/96/96070stp.htm>.  
"Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinees," <http://www.canton-ohio.com/hof/enshrinees/sayers.html>.

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in William Blinn's *Brian's Song* should include these aspects:

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### Themes

- challenge
- racism
- competition
- values
- friendship
- compassion
- sharing
- death
- grief

### Motifs

- taking advantage of opportunity
- moving into unfamiliar territory
- accepting the role of sports pioneers
- using humor as a weapon against despair
- coping with terminal illness
- accepting the death of a young, vigorous sports star

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the play. Explain each. Page numbers are provided so that you can re-read the passage from which the item is taken.

1. You new guys are going to be given a playbook tomorrow. It's like the Bible, except the Gideons don't replace it for free. (p. 13)  
*(To a rookie joining the Chicago Bears, the playbook is like a Bible in that it serves as a guidebook to plays. J. C. Caroline compares the playbook to the type of Bible found in hotel rooms and provided by the Gideon society, organized by three Christian travelers in Janesville, Wisconsin, in 1899, and currently located in Chicago. From 1908, the Gideon Christian Commercial Men's Association of America has supplied Bibles to places of lodging, hospitals, doctors' offices, and hospitals. On each Gideon Bible the membership stamps its symbol—a two-handled pitcher and torch—in recognition of Gideon's military victory over the Midianites as described in Judges 7.)*
2. Martin Bormann is not in Argentina. (p. 19)  
*(The quip about Bormann indicates that Abe Gibrón, described earlier as "all football," is a ruthless trainer. The real Martin Bormann (1900-?) served as the Nazi party leader in Germany. Often referred to as Hitler's "evil genius," Bormann, a native of Saxony, rose to a high level of authority during World War II and masterminded much of the atrocity that accompanied the conflict. Following Hitler's suicide and cremation in a bunker, Bormann disappeared. He was rumored to have lived out the remainder of his life in Argentina, a South American nation that teetered between alliances during the war years, at times siding with the Axis powers.)*
3. Gale smiles; he was at three hundred feet and the chute finally opened. (p. 27)  
*(During his meeting with Caroline, Halas, and McCaskey, Gale fears the worst about his future with the Chicago Bears, even suggesting that the key strategists want him "to play flanker, not running back." To his relief, he learns that the reason for their serious confrontation is to ask him to room with a white player. To Gale, the situation compares to a parachute jump in which the chute opens at the last minute, saving the parachutist.)*
4. All we can see is Gale; the harsh pinpoint of the carbon arc is centered on him with no residual spillage. (p. 41)  
*(To emphasize Gale's fear of public speaking, William Blinn reveals him within the unwinking stare of the spotlight, which sheds light on no one else. As might be expected, Gale freezes and forgets his prepared speech. Blinn comments, "At this instant, staring out at all those eager faces, Gale Sayers has all the mental quickness and agility of a retarded newt.")*
5. It's a Maltese Falcon, kid—get this inside—and the free world is safe. (p. 44)  
*(Brian, to ease the tension of competition with his friend, adopts the characteristics of actor Humphrey Bogart (1899-1957), star of the classic cinema thriller "The Maltese Falcon." Brian speaks of the trophy as though it were a movie prop. The ploy works. Gale succumbs to Brian's humor.)*
6. But it's only temporary, for Brian ups the ante once more, the pace now at 440 clip. (p. 68)  
*(On their jog on the dirt road, Brian sets a comfortable pace at first and then quickens the pace. The phrase "ups the ante" comes from poker and refers to the amount a player must wager initially to join the game. Brian, by upping the ante, forces Gale to exert more energy as he tests his ability to compete against Brian. Gale, who is recovering from a knee injury, "is a little surprised at this cross-country route, but he's right after Brian, though he's got about five or six yards to make up due to the momentary hesitation.")*
7. Joy—are you telling me as I lie on this bed of pain, my body whittled away at by a ruthless band of strangers with Exacto knives—are you telling me I can't have any pizza? (p. 92)  
*(Brian, following removal of a cancerous lung, compares his experience to a crude excision with a craft knife, suitable for making models or cutting cardboard. Joy does not have the heart to deny him his favorite foods—pizza and beer—even though he should not be entertaining visitors, much less eating spicy food.)*
8. The nurse nods nicely, holding up a finger as she flips swiftly through the Rolodex in front of her. (p. 95)  
*(Nurse #2 uses a round card file that hangs on a frame and rotates vertically to display separate listings of data, usually arranged in alphabetic order. The news of Patti Lucas's death, which is passed along as factual information, foreshadows Brian's unsuccessful battle against cancer.)*
9. She is looking into lens, smiling Cheshirely, a hypodermic needle in hand. (p. 108)  
*(Nurse #1, who intends to inject Brian with a sedative before he goes into surgery a second time, bears a knowing smile, similar to the Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. In Carroll's novel, the cat is capable of disappearing, leaving behind only its smile.)*
10. You are so bad—a racist, that's all you are. Bigot from head to toe. (p. 114)  
*(Gale, in mock-seriousness, chides Brian for his racist joke about desiring chitlings [boiled hog intestines] after receiving a pint of blood from a black donor. Gale labels Brian a bigot, a person who promulgates narrow-minded and prejudicial illogic.)*

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### 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 play.

#### Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Give examples of Brian Piccolo's use of humor.

*(In difficult situations, Brian eases his way by making jokes, often at his own expense. On seeing Gale Sayers at training camp, Brian learns that Gale does not remember their first meeting at the All-America game in Buffalo the preceding June. Brian reminisces tongue-in-cheek: "That was a heckuva talk we had, man. I mean, I walked up and said: 'I'm Brian Piccolo.' . . . And you said—I'll never forget it—you said: 'Uh-huh.'"*

*In other sticky moments, such as an interview, Brian quips to a reporter that he doesn't mind a black roommate, "Not as long as he doesn't use the bathroom." The frivolous one-liners roll on throughout the play, becoming more poignant when Brian goes to the hospital. After the nurse ejects Brian's visitors, he drools, "Don't come any closer, Miss Furman. White lisle stockings turn me on!"*

*Even when Brian fights for the remainder of his strength, his wit holds true. In a telephone conversation about Gale's donation of a pint of blood, Brian declares, "I've had this craving for chitlins all day." The witticisms seem more forced as Brian's death approaches. In jock style, he notes, "It's fourth and eight, man—but they won't let me punt.")*

2. Explain how Brian convinces Gale to fight his way back from a knee injury.

*(After suffering a wrenching fall during NFL play against the 49ers at Wrigley Field, Gale is sidelined by a knee injury. Returning home from the hospital, Gale's profile tells the tale: "His face is chiseled with tension and anger—cold, acid anger." His tight-lipped replies to Linda are proof that he resents the painful, disabling injury.*

*As fear replaces his macho mask, Gale responds to the unmistakable sound of the "Wake Forest fight song," emanating from the basement. Finding Brian in the act of constructing a leg-lift machine, Gale remains distant and short-tempered. Brian, cleverly inserting the word afraid in his remarks, strikes the right chord. To remove all traces of do-gooderism from his deed, Brian reminds Gale that Brian wants to compete for Gale's position on the team, but he "won't take the job from a cripple."*

*Leg-lifts prove painful to Gale, but Brian goads him on, even calling him a nigger and a quitter. As weight training gives way to road work, Brian gradually ups the competition, driving Gale to the extent of his performance ability. Together, they return to training camp, Gale "going through the obstacle course, with Brian right behind him, both handling it with relative ease.")*

3. Describe indications that Brian is ill.

*(As the team weighs in, Gibron complains that Brian, the "skinniest fullback in the league," is "down another pound" for a total of ten pounds lost. Brian retorts that Gibron runs the fat off. The trade-off fails in one aspect—Brian, even though he is lighter, has gained no speed in the forty-yard sprint.*

*As Brian and Gale rest from a punt return, Gale recovers his breath long before Brian, who claims to be*

*winded by allergy to pollen. Gale pays closer attention to Brian, realizing that Brian is more than out of breath. Coughing and drinking from the water bucket, Brian seems distracted by the chronic fatigue that drags him down. Still, he keeps up the spirit of the game with faked enthusiasm of a "thumbs up."*

*Halas decides to replace Brian with Ralph Kune and send Brian back to Chicago for the sake of the team. Brian rails at Gibron's lecture about "[patching] things up with Joy." He sneers at Dr. Fox's diagnoses of virus, staph infection, or "any one of a thousand things." In typical comic fashion, he admits what he suspects—pregnancy.)*

4. Describe Gale's response to the diagnosis of cancer.

*(The meeting in the coach's office is grim, the tone in Halas's voice "something vulnerable and sad, out of key." It is Halas who breaks the news that a "phone call from Memorial Hospital" confirms that "Brian Piccolo has cancer." Gale's response is "prayerful disbelief and awe."*

*The remainder of the bad news is "like a scrotal whiplash"—Brian must have part of his right lung removed the next morning. Gale sinks into a chair, "his spirit . . . blindsided." The coaches, McCaskey and Halas, also grieved and shocked, leave it to Gale to break the news to the team.*

*In the locker room, Gale addresses the semicircle of players with quavering voice, avoiding negative words and concluding with a suggestion that the players win their game and send an autographed ball to "Pic." He must turn aside to hide tears.)*

5. Describe Brian's relationship with hospital visitors after his initial surgery.

*(Surrounded by more people than a sick man needs after having a lung removed, Brian jokes about the headline, "COLTS DUMP BEARS 24-21." Friends sit on the bed and gather around a small table, where pizza and two six-packs of beer indicate a party in progress. Joy doubts that the gathering is a good idea for her husband's well-being. Brian jokes that he must not be denied his favorite food after undergoing surgery "by a ruthless band of strangers with Exacto knives."*

*After Joy joins the snackers, Brian offers to exhibit his scar. Visitors decline the opportunity. Nurse Furman enters and ejects "Gale, Butkus, Concannon, Caroline and Mayes" along with pizza and beer. Even Joy kisses Brian goodbye so that he can get some rest. Before she leaves, Brian dispatches her and Gale to Patti Lucas's room to sign an autograph for a fellow patient. Once Miss Furman leaves, Brian attempts to sneak out the door, but she catches him and stares him down.)*

#### Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Contrast Gale and Brian as patients.

*(To Gale, football is life. A banged-up knee means that he can no longer participate. Brian, well aware of his friend's dependence on the sport, forces Gale into intense rehabilitative exercise, even goading Gale through miserable leg-lifts and road work. Knowing that Brian is gaining on him during regular season play, Gale abandons his cane in the spirit of competition and gets back to the line as soon as he is able.*

*In contrast, Brian avoids admitting he is ill, but, once*

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he is diagnosed as a victim of lung cancer, he considers alternatives. He even toys with the idea of giving up his position to compete for the job of kicker. Determined to face his malady and whip it, Brian insists: "Look—I'm no idiot.—This thing is bad—I know that—but it's a detour, Joy—that's all. It's not going to stop me because I'm not going to let it stop me. No way . . .")

7. Describe Joy's reliance on Gale.

(From the beginning of the couples' relationship, Joy and Gale are friends, both loving and supporting Brian Piccolo. After the doctors locate more malignancy in Brian's lung, Joy calls Gale at his hotel room and begs him to be at Brian's bedside when Brian gets the bad news. Already alerted by Brian that Joy needs cheering up, Gale is not surprised to learn that the news is not encouraging. Gale, a true friend, promises to be there the next day.

Both Gale and Joy keep a vigil near Brian as he slips away from them. Brian grips Gale's hand when "an agonizing spasm rips through his frame." Joy leans close, weeping and blotting perspiration from Brian's brow. The two share Brian's final moments as Brian and Gale reminisce about their careers.)

8. Explain Brian's final words.

(The reason for Brian's last utterance is unclear. Perhaps his words, "Who'd believe it, Joy—who'd ever believe it . . .," indicate that he wonders how he came to a position of greatness on an NFL team. Another possibility is that Brian marvels that so strong a body could give in to a fatal disease at the age of 27. Still another interpretation is that Brian is amazed how the two very different personalities of Gale and Brian could become lasting friends, sharing a love of football right up to Brian's last moments.)

### Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. Explain why this play remains a classic of young adult literature.

(Brian's Song possesses many of the characteristics that please young readers. It pits two strong athletes from real life in a realistic struggle for top place. Likewise, it superimposes human vulnerability over desires for fame and gratification and reveals that health is finite and not to be taken for granted. On the social level, the work also demonstrates that a biracial friendship based on mutual admiration and trust rates careful consideration.

More than anything, this play models the give and take of any human relationship—whether husband and wife, friend and friend, team and coach, or teammate and competitor. From the successes and disappointments of two young lives, students learn that life's best moments are transitory, often followed by severe loss and heartbreak. This lesson teaches appreciation for the moment, especially for the season of life when good health is the norm.)

10. Analyze how biography affects readers.

(For any reader, old or young, the examples of real life remain among the most useful of reading experiences because they provide lasting models of life choices. From Gale's experience with knee injury, Brian's confrontation with cancer, and both men's encounter with racial prejudice, the reader learns that challenge of any type deserves the same response. Whatever difficulty

confronts Gale and Brian merits the same reaction—hard work tempered with determination, loyalty, and a twist of humor make the pain of loss bearable.)

### Questions 11 and 12 Creative Level

11. Outline a brief oral presentation on other American heroes who have faced debilitating diseases, such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Helen Keller, and Thomas Edison. If possible, quote the subject's words about facing difficult moments in an otherwise promising career.
12. Research commentary on Brian Piccolo's career from newspaper and magazine articles and compare the picture you receive with that of William Blinn. Refer to the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* for suitable material. Keep a bibliography of the works you consult.

## ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

### Art

- Using desk-top publishing or other artistic media, explain references to saying his beads, flying blind, rock the boat, hazing, ante, thumbs up, gauntlet, tempo, Maltese Falcon, Flying Nun, Doctor Welby, and the brass ring.
- Draw a book jacket or poster emphasizing some aspect of life for an NFL player, such as arriving for training, studying a playbook, attending a meeting with coaches, paying a fine, obeying curfew, studying the roster, being traded, having an ankle taped, sitting in a whirlpool bath, or being interviewed after a successful game.
- Design one of the following: an insignia for the Chicago Bears, multiple views of a stadium or operating theater, a placard or trophy honoring the winner of the game ball, a signboard praising the "Rookie of the Year," a handbook for trainers and team doctors, an epitaph for Patti Lucas, detailed sketches of an invasive tumor, a low-fat diet chart for team members during training, a graph depicting the rise and decline of Brian Piccolo's career, a news headline and story about Brian's illness and death, a map depicting NFL game locations, and a list of action verbs used to describe football action.

### Science and Health

- Lead a debate on the issue of telling a dying man that his disease is fatal. Why does Mr. Eberle's mistake jeopardize Brian's ability to cope with a second operation for lung cancer?
- Compose an informal essay explaining ways for people to protect themselves from cancer or to recover from surgery or other invasive treatment. Keep the tone and approach simple enough for most readers to comprehend. Consult the American Cancer Society for ideas.

### Journalism

- Compose a character sketch emphasizing Brian's role as Italian-American, friend, teammate, trainer, competitor, father, husband, employee, and patient. Conclude how he would want to be remembered.
- Compose an epitaph for a sports magazine or Chicago newspaper in which you express the value of Gale's friendship during Brian's hospitalization. Describe the type of candid shots you would choose for a photographic essay on Brian Piccolo's career.

### Cinema and Drama

- Explain in a theme why William Blinn gives maximum attention to camera angles. How does the camera alter the performance from a stage play to a made-for-TV

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movie?

2. Compose a short speech in which you describe the mutual role of Brian and Gale in building a teammate's courage, stamina, and hope. Express Gale's difficulty in facing Brian's impending death from lung cancer.
3. Draw settings for a television interview of the people who knew Brian well and admired his courage. Include players and coaches from Wake Forest and from the Chicago Bears, hospital staff, media, Joy, Linda, and the Piccolo children.
4. Make an audio tape of *Brian's Song*. Select contrasting voices to play the major roles. Add sound effects, for example, crowd noises, panting, running, calisthenics, a leg-lift machine, telephones, and dormitory rowdiness.

### Geography

1. Compose a diary of settings, particularly Decatur, Buffalo, Montreal, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Miami, Los Angeles Coliseum, Chicago, Detroit, Wrigley Field, and Palm Springs.
2. Explain the humorous mention of Death Valley. Locate the setting on a map.

### Sports

1. Describe in a short speech numerous examples of a pep talk. Explain why coaches must promote morale and competition among players. Discuss the value of stop-watches, film clips, and weight charts in establishing fairness for starting lineups.
2. Make a time line of events in Brian's life, beginning with enrollment at Wake Forest and concluding with his death. Discuss events influencing civil rights that take place in 1965.
3. Discuss with a group the motif of tension that permeates the screenplay. How does the competition of pre-game or pre-season scenes differ from the tension in Brian's hospital room or Joy's living room?
4. Compose a short segment in which you define the NFL, its history, and its impact on American television and sports.
5. Create a bulletin board illustrating preparations for an NFL game. Why do teams study their opposition's pattern of wins and losses? Why is it important to know the styles and weaknesses of opposing players?

### Social Studies and Current Events

1. Explain to a small group why the Bears' coaches want Gale and Brian to room together without incident or rancor. Why would dissension harm the players, team, and fans?
2. Discuss your response to famous sports figures or actors who die or become too ill or injured to play or perform, for instance, Christopher Reeves, Lou Gehrig, Magic Johnson, Babe Didrikson Zaharias, Arthur Ashe, Esther Rolle, or Florence Joyner.
3. Write several conversations in which players, officials, football fans, and sports reporters discuss the implications of the first alliance of a black and a white as dormitory roommates. Act out your dialogue for an audio or video taping.

### Psychology

1. Make an oral report on the theme of confidence. Use as examples Gale's speech at the banquet, Brian's attitude toward the first surgery, Gale's determination to heal his

knee, and Brian's assurance that he and Gale would not be cut from the team roster.

2. Describe aloud the plight of a star who loses the ability to perform, either from injury, disease, or age. Apply the situation to dancers, actors, singers, painters, athletes, and designers. Discuss how frustration can be the impetus to a new career, for example, Grandma Moses's loss of the ability to sew and her developing interest in painting scenes from her girlhood.
3. Contrast attitudes toward Brian's death. Mention Gale, Joy, Linda, Brian's children, Coach Halas, teammates, fans, Dr. Fox, and hospital medical personnel, particularly Mr. Eberle and Miss Furman.

### Mathematics and Computers

Generate graphs or create a bulletin board illustrating the length of career for successful NFL players. List causes for their resignation, including injury, age, and declining performance.

### Language and Speech

Explain briefly the irony of Gale's speeches to his teammates and at the banquet. How has Brian influenced the "Great Stone Face from Kansas"? How do Brian's jokes and commentary differ from Gale's?

### Literature

1. Create and discuss a list of images that appeal to the five senses, for instance the sight of Gale throwing his cane into the litter basket, the sound of Brian putting the leg-lift machine together, the feel of Gale's cast, the taste of pepperoni pizza, and the smell of sweaty jerseys in the locker room, disinfectant in the children's ward, or flowers at the head table during the banquet.
2. Divide the class into small groups to study literary elements of the screenplay, particularly sense impressions, dialogue, symbols, episodes, black humor, allusion, similes, vignettes, tableaux, symbols, and quips.
3. Write a theme in which you explain the significance of a minor character. Why do television screenwriters keep the number of actors to a minimum?
4. Draw a character web representing the interconnectedness among teammates, opposing teams, staff, family, and medical personnel. Where will you place Patti Lucas? Joy's baby? announcers? the press?

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Apply a Venn diagram to pairs of unlike characters, e. g., Brian and Patti Lucas, Joy and Coach Halas, J. C. Caroline and Linda, the Wake Forest team and Miss Furman, the surgeon and Ed McCaskey, or Mr. Eberle and the All-America team.
2. In a news feature, characterize Gale Sayers's overall career. Did his position with the Bears alter? Did he suffer further injuries? Did he memorialize his friend Brian?
3. Survey the difference between professional sports and the Olympics. Summarize the honors, awards, travel, fans, national media coverage, and lifetime earnings.
4. Read aloud other descriptions of people facing disease, impairment, or death. Discuss the importance of friends, medical care, inner strength, activity, and faith.
5. Form a team of readers to tape re-written episodes of *Brian's Song*. Vary the dialogue to include yourself and other classmates as interviewers, fans, coaches, med-



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ical personnel, hospital visitors, and players. Add to the tape as other classmates create lines for themselves.

- Using examples from the book, create additional colorful turns of phrase. Find examples of intense emotion, sense impressions, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, alliteration, cacophony, repetition, dialogue, slang, dialect, realistic detail, wit, and foreshadowing.
- Compose an extended definition of competition. Describe both positive and negative aspects, especially for professional team players. Use Brian and Gale's rivalry as a model of rivalry tempered by friendship and mutual respect.
- Role-play a daily scene from a rehabilitation center, locker room, practice field, training room, or hospital room. Indicate how Brian applies wit and drollery to serious situations without becoming tedious, obnoxious, insulting, or childish.
- In a term paper, contrast William Blinn's Brian with other characters who face dilemmas. Consider protagonists in August Wilson's *Fences*, Robin McKinley's *Dove*, Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, Michael Dorris's *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Margaret Rostkowski's *After the Dancing Days*, N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Theodora Kroeber's *Ishi: Last of His Tribe*, Gary Paulsen's *Nightjohn* or *Hatchet*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, or Robin McKinley's *Beauty*.
- Work with a group to create realistic scenes in the life of such sports figures as Arthur Ashe, Tiger Woods, Kristi Yamaguchi, and Mark Mathabane.

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

- List examples of friendship, racism, teasing, grief, honesty, fear, anxiety, and character in the play.
- Compile a list of scenes that demonstrate Gale and Brian's unwholesome attitudes and behaviors.
- Compose a scene in which Gale returns to play for the Bears and receives a new roommate.
- Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including George Halas's short temper, Brian's silliness, Gale's low spirits, and Miss Furman's harsh expression.
- Account for the importance of interracial roommates to American sports.

### RELATED READING

Charles Barkley, *Outrageous*  
Tom Biracree, *Wilma Rudolph*  
Eleanor Coerr, *Sadako, Or the Thousand Paper Cranes*  
Wayne R. Coffey, *Carl Lewis*  
Craig Ellenport, *Head-to-Head Football*  
Dick Gregory, *Nigger*  
John Gunther, *Death Be Not Proud*  
S. E. Hinton, *Tex and That Was Then, This Is Now*  
Robert Lipsyte, *Joe Louis*  
Elizabeth A. Lynn, *Babe Didrickson Zaharias*  
Lois Nicholson, *Michael Jackson*  
Cynthia Rylant, *Missing May*  
Peter Strupp, *Quarterback Attack*  
John Updike, "The Ex-Basketball Player"  
Guernsey Van Riper, *Jim Thorpe: Olympic Champion*

Cynthia Voigt, *Izzy Willy-Nilly*  
James Vance Walker, *Walkabout*  
Ruth White, *Belle Prater's Boy*

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## BRIAN'S SONG

### VOCABULARY TEST

Choose a vocabulary word to complete each of the following sentences.

|             |                |               |         |               |
|-------------|----------------|---------------|---------|---------------|
| aggregation | crescent       | festoon       | lisle   | poultice      |
| blatantly   | deteriorating  | imperceptible | pan     | precision     |
| blitz       | enervated      | inscription   | perusal | stoic         |
| braces      | exasperated    | insignia      | platoon | tumor         |
| bromides    | fatalistically | introspection | ploy    | unprecedented |

1. It's one thing to suspect your husbands have gone bananas, quite another to see it so \_\_\_\_\_ proven.
2. It's almost \_\_\_\_\_, but Gale is making up ground on Brian.
3. Fifty men hit the dirt at gut-rending impact, then are up on their feet, running in place—huge men, human trees, gasping for breath, posture \_\_\_\_\_—then damn! down! and it hurts, that's the only word, and they're up and running once more, knees pistoning clods of earth.
4. Stopwatches are held out for Halas's \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Another team picture is being tacked on the wall, the printing identifying it as last year's Bear \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The team is lined up in two parallel rows, taking off in the wind sprints in \_\_\_\_\_ of two.
7. The two young men look at each other, neither having any notion that might explain this \_\_\_\_\_ visit.
8. We \_\_\_\_\_ across the room to find Brian, same look, same activity.
9. Halas pulls up a stool and sits, drained, \_\_\_\_\_.
10. She shakes her head, \_\_\_\_\_ and loving them all very much.
11. White \_\_\_\_\_ stockings turn me on!
12. Linda offering presence and mute compassion but knowing better than to voice any \_\_\_\_\_.
13. He tosses the pieces of paper in the air, like confetti, smiling \_\_\_\_\_.
14. His expression is \_\_\_\_\_, the pace quite slow, the sort of speed one recommends to those just discharged from the hospital after hernial surgery.
15. Halas and McCaskey are no less affected; they've merely had a few moments to apply an emotional \_\_\_\_\_.
16. [Gale] takes a breath, looking beyond the three men, giving the question the steady \_\_\_\_\_ it deserves.
17. The team comes out of the huddle, moving with \_\_\_\_\_ into the chosen formation.
18. He's wearing old clothes, carries a \_\_\_\_\_ wrench in one hand.
19. He is leaning over Gale, mind seeking a \_\_\_\_\_.
20. Gale looks down at the \_\_\_\_\_ on the trophy.

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### COMPREHENSION TEST A

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

Match the following descriptions with the characters being described. Choose your answers from the list of characters below.

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| _____ 1. undergoes surgery the same day that Brian does.                      | A. Brian          |
| _____ 2. telephones Gale and asks him to hurry to the hospital.               | B. Patti Lucas    |
| _____ 3. taunts Gale and calls him a nigger.                                  | C. Mr. Eberle     |
| _____ 4. is known as "the great Stone Face from Kansas."                      | D. Gale           |
| _____ 5. sits on mashed potatoes.   | E. J. C. Caroline |
| _____ 6. names Brian a fullback.  | F. George Halas   |
| _____ 7. complains that "a lineback shouldn't have to race a defensive back." | G. Dick Butkus    |
| _____ 8. requests Brian's signature on a surgical consent form.               | H. Joy            |
| _____ 9. calls a player "Black Magic."  | I. Linda          |
| _____ 10. posts starting lineups on a bulletin board.                         | J. Miss Furman    |

#### Part II: True/False (30 points)

Mark each statement either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false. Rewrite each false statement to make it true.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. At first, Gale resents the fact that he does not run as fast as Brian.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Linda makes a rapid adjustment to friendship with a white couple.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The wives are encouraged to visit their husbands at training camp to keep up morale.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Brian does not seem embarrassed to sing the Wake Forest fight song at dinner.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The cancer makes itself known when Brian begins to lose weight and speed.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Patti is delighted with the autograph of a real Chicago Bear.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Gale returns to training camp with the news that his wife is pregnant a second time.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Brian shows no shame in being labelled a wop.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Gale wins the All-American trophy, but dedicates it to Brian.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Brian and Gale are so successful as roommates that no one makes racial comments about their relationship.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The posting of the starting lineup at first causes mixed emotions in Brian.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. George Halas is extremely vain about his impaired hearing.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Butkus rejects Gale's suggestion that the game ball go to Brian.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Brian teases Gale about dedicating the game ball and then losing the game.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Brian says farewell to Gale over the telephone.  
\_\_\_\_\_

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### Part III: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Identify the following quotations by naming both the speaker (a) and the person being addressed (b).

\_\_\_\_\_ 1A. Being in the All-Star game puts you three weeks behind everybody else.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2A. He lost ten pounds and he's half a second slower over a forty-yard sprint.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3A. And what Pic is saying to you now, is that you're scheduling this game before he can get

\_\_\_\_\_ 3B. ready.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4A. All right, Gloomy Gus—what do you think of my brainstorm?

\_\_\_\_\_ 4B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5A. You two are the first black and white to room together on the team. Any problems so far?

\_\_\_\_\_ 5B.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe Gale's initial reaction to Brian and his jokes.
2. Give evidence that Gale is overcoming his inability to express himself.
3. Analyze examples of sportsmanlike conduct in Gale and Brian.
4. Describe the rigors of training camp.

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### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select an answer to complete each of the following statements.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. After receiving donated blood from Gale, Brian
  - A. sends out for a pizza and beer.
  - B. makes a joke about craving chitlins.
  - C. wishes that he could do a good deed for Gale.
  - D. tells Joy that he will soon recover.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. At the pizza parlor, Brian tells a funny story about
  - A. the "sucker play."
  - B. Gale's first day in an integrated rooming arrangement.
  - C. Patti Lucas.
  - D. Wake Forest's fight song and mashed potatoes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Because he has part of his right lung, Brian considers
  - A. taking up a different sport.
  - B. leaving the NFL.
  - C. working as a trainer.
  - D. becoming a kicker.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Caroline warns the rookies that
  - A. they must eat regular meals and avoid late hours and women.
  - B. Abe Gibron expects a complete realignment of players.
  - C. loss of a playbook will result in a fine of \$500.
  - D. wives must remain in their part of the bleachers during games.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. After learning that Brian will lose part of his right lung,
  - A. Halas asks Gale to keep the matter a secret until after the game.
  - B. Gale breaks the news to his teammates.
  - C. Linda calls Gale and begs him to hurry.
  - D. Mr. Eberle gently removes blood samples before the operation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Brian Piccolo and Gale Sayers first meet at
  - A. a dinner for rookies.
  - B. Brian's room at the training camp of the Chicago Bears.
  - C. near the practice field.
  - D. the All-America game in Buffalo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Brian teases Gale about
  - A. losing the game ball to Dick Butkus.
  - B. Linda's pregnancy.
  - C. Gale's inability to express himself.
  - D. winning the coach's trophy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When symptoms of weakness first appear,
  - A. Gibron urges Brian to improve his marriage.
  - B. Gale tries to cover up Brian's weight loss.
  - C. Halas telephones Dr. Fox for news of the tests.
  - D. Gale assumes that Brian's allergies are food-related.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Patti's death alarms Gale and Joy because
  - A. Brian was protecting Patti from the truth about her cancer.
  - B. Dr. Fox asked them to take her an autographed ball.
  - C. she had the same type of cancer that Brian has.
  - D. they have not allowed themselves to think that Brian, too, might die.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. In his last conversation with Gale, Brian
  - A. admits that he will not live through the night.
  - B. thanks Gale for teaching him a lot about running.
  - C. teases Gale about making speeches.
  - D. asks Gale to look after Brian's three daughters.

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**Part II: Fill-in (30 points)**

Fill in the blanks with answers which complete each statement. Refer to the list that follows for possible answers.

|               |             |          |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|----------|---------------|-------------|
| Abe Gibron    | end         | hiring   | promotion     | trap        |
| All-star game | 440         | improved | quitter       | tumor       |
| Brian Piccolo | Gale Sayers | Italian  | rehabilitated | Wake Forest |
| courageous    | Gipper      | leg-lift | team          | wind sprint |
| Ed McCaskey   | hazing      | playbook | traded        | wop         |

1. You two are the first black and white to room together on the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is an assistant coach possessed of a voice that could shatter a glass eye at fifty paces when the eyelid is closed.
3. This may be the tenth \_\_\_\_\_ they've run today.
4. As you know, Coach Halas frowns on the \_\_\_\_\_ of new men.
5. Anyway—Concannon calls a \_\_\_\_\_ up the middle, Gale carrying the ball.
6. Joy and I had a long talk last night—about whether or not I should ask to be \_\_\_\_\_.
7. And opposite them, Brian Piccolo is tightening bolts on a metal framework that will eventually be used as a \_\_\_\_\_ machine.
8. Tuck ended up at Auburn—and I ended up at \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Quarterback Jack Concannon was eight for fourteen passing, and the running game was ably manned by \_\_\_\_\_, who gained 105 yards in fourteen carries.
10. You new guys are to be given a \_\_\_\_\_ tomorrow.
11. Being in the \_\_\_\_\_ puts you three weeks behind everybody else.
12. Pat O'Brien never said, "Blow one for the \_\_\_\_\_," you know.
13. The tests show—there's more of the \_\_\_\_\_ than they thought, Pic.
14. Well—I roomed with an \_\_\_\_\_; you know how they are.
15. It reads: George S. Halas Award—Most \_\_\_\_\_ Player—to Gale Sayers.

**Part III: Short Answer (20 points)**

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Who names Gale "Black Magic"?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Who does Brian say is deaf on in the left ear?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who accidentally reveals to Brian that he must have more surgery?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. How old is Brian at the time of his death?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What state is Gale from?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Who asks Gale to help hang a picture?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What symbols on the blackboard indicate plays?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Whom does Gibron call a "boneheaded wop"?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Who suggests that Brian throw from the left?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. In what year do the Bears room teammates together according to position?

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Discuss the meaning of two of the following quotations from the novel.

1. I won't take the job from a cripple.
2. Football's terrific, man, but it's still just a job.
3. Brian Piccolo is the man of courage who should receive the George S. Halas Award.
4. Ernest Hemingway said that every true story ends in death. Well, this *is* a true story.

## BRIAN'S SONG

## ANSWER KEY

### VOCABULARY TEST

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. blatantly     | 11. lisle          |
| 2. imperceptible | 12. bromides       |
| 3. deteriorating | 13. fatalistically |
| 4. perusal       | 14. stoic          |
| 5. aggregation   | 15. poultice       |
| 6. braces        | 16. introspection  |
| 7. unprecedented | 17. precision      |
| 8. pan           | 18. crescent       |
| 9. enervated     | 19. ploy           |
| 10. exasperated  | 20. inscription    |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

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

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

#### Part II: True/False (30 points)

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

#### Part III: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1A. George Halas | 4A. Brian Piccolo |
| 1B. Gale Sayers  | 4B. Joy Piccolo   |
| 2A. Abe Gibron   | 5A. reporter      |
| 2B. Gale Sayers  | 5B. Brian Piccolo |
| 3A. Gale Sayers  |                   |
| 3B. Mr. Eberle   |                   |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. D  |
| 2. A | 7. C  |
| 3. D | 8. A  |
| 4. C | 9. D  |
| 5. B | 10. B |

#### Part II: Fill-in (30 points)

- |                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. team        | 9. Brian Piccolo  |
| 2. Abe Gibron  | 10. playbook      |
| 3. wind spring | 11. All-Star game |
| 4. hazing      | 12. Gipper        |
| 5. trap        | 13. tumor         |
| 6. traded      | 14. Italian       |
| 7. leg-lift    | 15. courageous    |
| 8. Wake Forest |                   |

#### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- |               |                   |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 1. Brian      | 6. Coach Halas    |
| 2. Halas      | 7. circles and Xs |
| 3. Mr. Eberle | 8. Brian          |
| 4. 26         | 9. Gale           |
| 5. Kansas     | 10. 1965          |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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