

*This guide was prepared using the Paperstar/Putnam & Grosset Group 1998 edition, copyright © 1974. Other editions may differ.*

### SYNOPSIS

**Chap. 1:** Thirteen-year-old Marcy Lewis, the novel's narrator, is a ninth-grader in junior high, and she has problems: "I hate my father. I hate school. I hate being fat.... Sometimes I feel guilty being so miserable, but middle-class kids have problems too." Marcy sees herself as a clumsy blimp. She has only one friend, Nancy Sheridan ("Beauty and the Blimp," Marcy says), and school is boring—until Ms. Finney arrives.

**Chap. 2:** Ms. Finney, a new young teacher, grabs the attention of Marcy and the other students in her English class. Ms. Finney dresses differently, wears large jewelry, calls herself "Ms." and says her aim is to teach the students about communication. After English class, Marcy moves on to gym. Marcy is so embarrassed about her fat body and flat chest that she is ashamed to change into her gym suit in front of the other girls. So she sits out each class after giving her gym teacher one of a series of outlandish excuses about why she doesn't have her gym suit. Today, the excuse is "The cat ate my gym suit."

**Chap. 3:** English class is interesting. Ms. Finney has the kids talk about themselves and their interpretations of the many books, movies, plays, and poems they read.

**Chap. 4:** Ms. Finney sponsors an after-school club, called Smedley, for her students who have said they want to talk more about how they feel inside. In an opening exercise, Marcy and Joel Anderson—who have known each other distantly since kindergarten—are paired to "get acquainted." Marcy is amazed to find that Joel, who she thinks is smart and cute, does not think she is awful.

**Chap. 5:** Marcy does not eat lunch alone anymore; she sits with kids from Smedley. Her home life, though, is terrible. Her father yells at both Marcy and her little brother Stuart, who cowers with his teddy bear and thumb-sucking for comfort, both of which Mr. Lewis ridicules. Mr. Lewis constantly belittles Marcy, saying things like, "Why do I have to have a daughter who is stupid and so fat?" When Marcy's mother tries to stop her husband's abusive behavior, they fight, and she cries and takes a tranquilizer. The children both cry, too, and then Mr. Lewis blames all the trouble on Marcy. Marcy runs upstairs to her room, where her mother comforts her and excuses Marcy's father's behavior, insisting that he really loves Marcy. This pattern repeats itself over and over.

**Chap. 6:** Marcy describes the innovative, interactive projects Ms. Finney uses to make learning fun, interesting, and effective.

**Chap. 7:** Mr. Stone, the school principal, comes into class frequently to observe Ms. Finney's teaching.

**Chap. 8:** One day, a substitute appears to replace Ms. Finney. Mr. Stone announces to the class, "Miss Finney will no longer be a teacher in my school. I want all of you to for-

get everything she taught you." Joel speaks up in protest, and then Marcy does too. Their reward is detention, where Nancy, Marcy, and Joel decide to find out why Ms. Finney has been fired.

**Chap. 9:** Mr. Stone calls Mrs. Lewis to complain about Marcy's protest; he expects Mrs. Lewis's support because she is president of the Parent Teacher Association. Marcy's father is predictably furious about Marcy's little rebellion, giving his daughter his prescription for life: "You must learn to respect those in authority" and "Just be good and play by the rules." Marcy insists that Ms. Finney has been a good teacher.

**Chap. 10:** The local newspaper reports that Ms. Finney has been dismissed because she has refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance. A hearing will be held on her dismissal the following Tuesday. At school, Joel asks Marcy to go to Nancy's party with him on Saturday, and Marcy notices that a lot of the kids do not say the Pledge. Mr. Stone calls Marcy to his office, where he yells at her for supporting Ms. Finney, of whose nontraditional appearance and teaching methods he strongly disapproves. Marcy, Joel, Nancy, and other concerned students meet after school and work out a plan: They will get groups of students to refuse to leave each homeroom in order to force Mr. Stone to talk to them about Ms. Finney's dismissal. Meanwhile, Marcy is able for the first time to talk to Nancy about why she will not take part in gym class, following Ms. Finney's advice to talk about things that bother you, and Joel walks Marcy home.

**Chap. 11:** Joel, Nancy, Marcy, and Robert Alexander, as leaders of the planned protest, are called to Mr. Stone's office, where they find Joel's father and the other students' mothers. The meeting is not all that Mr. Stone had hoped for: Joel's father supports his son's stand, and the formerly timid Lily Lewis declares that her formerly withdrawn daughter "has turned into someone I'm very proud of and I'm not sure she's doing anything wrong." Still, Mr. Stone suspends the four students, and school is closed until the hearing. At home, Marcy insists to her disapproving father that she is doing the right thing, and Mrs. Lewis surprisingly tells her angry husband, "I've made my own decision too. I'm going to support and help" Marcy.

**Chap. 12:** Marcy nervously anticipates her first date. She and her mother go shopping and buy Marcy a new outfit (in the Chubbies department, which Marcy hates) and jewelry; Nancy teaches Marcy some dance steps. Marcy and her father manage to have a non-yelling discussion about her support of Ms. Finney.

**Chap. 13:** After getting a new hat from her mother, Marcy points out that her mother always talks about dressing like and looking like everyone else. Marcy says she agrees with Ms. Finney, "that clothes can be an artistic expression of the individual. Mom, I do not want to look like everybody else, even if I could." That evening, Joel and Marcy go out after

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

Joel endures a living-room visit with Marcy's parents.

**Chap. 14:** At Nancy's party, Joel and Marcy talk rather than dance. Joel reveals that while his father is supportive and understanding, he cannot stand his mother. She divorced Joel's father after he gave up his corporate law for a much less lucrative private practice. Now she lives in Denver and is remarried to a school principal who is a lot like Mr. Stone. Joel says he hates her and has acted so badly when he visits her that she has given up trying to get custody of him; while Joel sounds defiant, he is really shaken by what he perceives as his mother's desertion. He says he does not trust people very much, but he would like to be (not romantic) friends with Marcy. The two of them leave the party early when it starts to get out of hand. Joel notices that Marcy had sipped at a beer she did not really like, and he gives her advice that is directly opposite to what she hears from her parents: "Marcy, you don't have to drink just because everyone does. Look, you're different. That's cool." Marcy still struggles to believe that blimps, while different, can also be happy. Joel gives Marcy a little friendly kiss on the forehead at her door.

**Chap. 15:** Marcy has another screaming argument with her father, who refuses to share the Sunday paper with her. Marcy yells, "I hate you!" and her father nearly hits her, held back by her mother.

**Chap. 16:** Marcy and her mother bicker, as Marcy struggles to make her own decisions and Mrs. Lewis struggles to find her own identity while still supporting her husband. Joel and Marcy go shopping, with Joel buying an atrociously ugly pin for his mother's birthday present.

**Chap. 17:** The local newspaper is filled with Letters to the Editor about Ms. Finney, about fifty-fifty on both sides. One of the letters is from Mrs. Lewis, writing in support of Ms. Finney. Mr. Lewis tries to stop his wife and Marcy from going to the school board hearing Tuesday evening by sabotaging the family car; Mrs. Lewis gets the Sheridans to give her and Marcy a ride. At the hearing, Mr. Stone presents his reasons for wanting Ms. Finney out of "his" school. Ms. Finney defends her way of dressing and her teaching methods, and explains that while she does salute the flag, she does not recite the Pledge because she does not feel that the country offers liberty and justice to all yet. The school board has satisfactory evaluation reports on Ms. Finney's teaching, so they make their decision solely on the Pledge issue. While most board members disapprove of Ms. Finney's stance, legal precedent supports her freedom not to recite. Ms. Finney is reinstated. Joel, Marcy, Mrs. Lewis, and other supporters explode in a joyful outburst. But they are silenced when Ms. Finney takes the podium and announces that she feels she cannot be an effective teacher any longer with the community so deeply divided on this issue—so she resigns. This anticlimax seriously deflates Marcy and Joel, but Mrs. Lewis and Mr. Anderson help them see that Ms. Finney has probably made the right decision, and that the entire episode has been a tremendous growing and learning experience for the kids. They may have lost Ms. Finney as a teacher, but they will continue to follow her advice for learning and living.

**Chap. 18:** Marcy briefly tells us the status quo one month after the hearing. Mrs. Lewis is taking night courses at a local college; Joel and Marcy are very close friends; Marcy is in counseling, and it is helping; Marcy still hates her father.

## TIME LINE

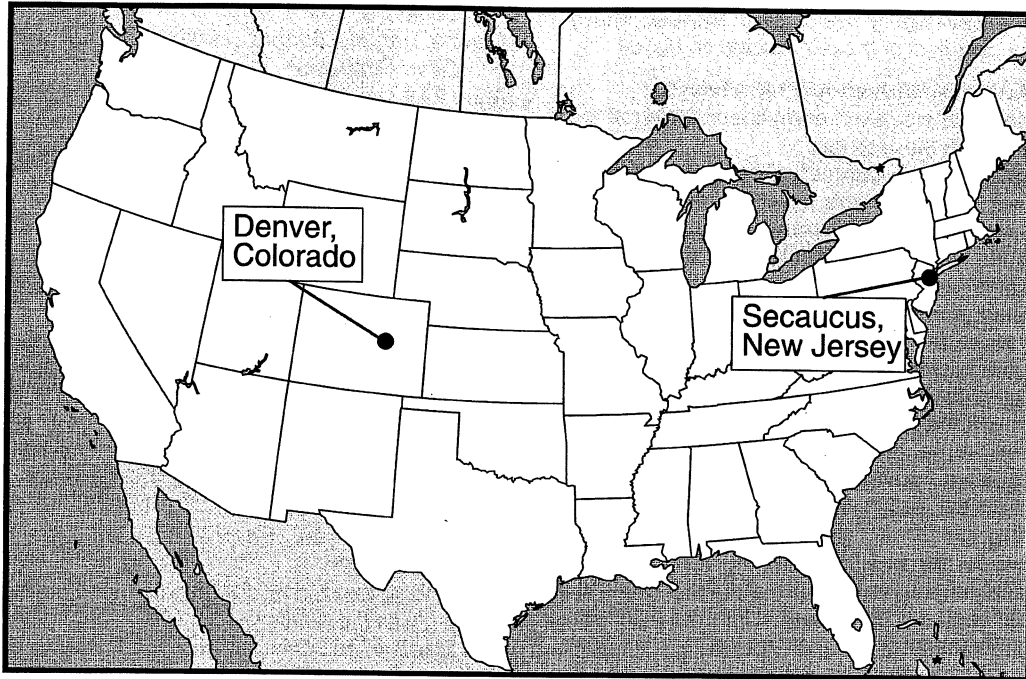
<b>early in school year</b>	Ms. Finney starts teaching English at Eisenhower Junior High.
<b>soon after</b>	Ms. Finney sponsors an after-school club, Smedley. Marcy and Joel start talking to each other.
<b>early October</b>	Ms. Finney is fired. Marcy and Joel vocally object.
<b>next day</b>	Students plan their protest.
<b>next day</b>	Mr. Stone calls in parents, suspends Marcy, Joel, Nancy, and Robert.
<b>Saturday, 2 days later</b>	Marcy and Joel go to Nancy's party together.
<b>Tuesday, 3 days later</b>	A hearing is held on Ms. Finney's dismissal; she is reinstated and she promptly resigns.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paula Danziger was born in Washington, D.C., in 1944 and grew up in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. A lover of books from an early age, she knew by the time she was in second grade that she wanted to become a published writer. Like Marcy Lewis in *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, Danziger's middle-class childhood was not easy. Young Paula was overweight and asthmatic. She did not do particularly well in school, her parents raised her with low career and education expectations, her father (like Marcy's) was angry and emotionally abusive, and her mother (like Marcy's) questioned why Paula did not think or dress like all the other kids. Danziger coped with these problems through her sense of humor and the realization that each experience, even if painful, would provide fodder for her later writing. In high school, Danziger wrote for both the school and local newspaper, which boosted her self-esteem. While attending Montclair State College, Danziger became baby-sitter and surrogate family member for author and poet John Ciardi and his wife; Ciardi became Danziger's mentor.

After college, Danziger taught junior high English; Ms. Finney in *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* is based on Danziger as a teacher, including her way of dressing, her innovative teaching methods, her way of connecting with her students, and her dislike of formal school rules and paperwork. After three years of teaching, she went back to Montclair to earn a master's degree in reading. In one week, she was a victim in two serious automobile accidents; her struggle to recover stirred up childhood feelings of helplessness, fear, and anger. As part of her therapy, she began to write the heavily autobiographical *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, published in 1974. Enthusiastic young readers bought so many copies of this and Danziger's next young adult novel, *The Pistachio Prescription*, that the author decided to stop teaching and devote herself full-time to writing. Many more successful books have followed, including *There's a Bat in Bunk Five*, a summer-camp sequel to *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*. In 1989, Danziger began a series of preteen books featuring 11-year-old Matthew Martin, followed by a series about the even younger Amber Brown. Danziger now divides her time among her New York City apartment, her home in Woodstock, New York, and her flat in London. The free-spirited and entertaining Danziger spends a lot of time traveling across the country and around England visiting schools and talking with students, and she is a popular regular on several

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT



BBC-TV children's shows.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Paula Danziger is one of today's most popular writers for young adults and younger readers. She writes about real problems kids face in everyday life, with a light, breezy, humorous touch that keeps her audience entertained while they strongly identify with the novel's young characters. Not all critics are equally enthused; some complain that Danziger is trite, offering only easily recognizable characters with stereotypical teen feelings. Danziger would respond that that is just the point—kids are gratified to recognize their own feelings in her novels' young protagonists; she aims to touch her readers' lives and make them feel less alone, and she succeeds thoroughly. As Marcy says, "Middle-class kids have problems too." Other critics, though, find much to admire in Danziger's works.

*The New York Times Book Review* called *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* "funny and alive" with a "snappy, contemporary voice." *The Journal of Reading* described the novel as "a thoroughly enjoyable, tightly written, funny/sad tale of an unglamorous but plucky girl who is imaginative, believable, and worthy of emulation." *Publishers Weekly* added, "Ms. Danziger has an attractive style; her prose sparkles with wit and originality," and *School Library Journal* found Marcy "an appealing heroine."

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss teaching and learning styles that excite and interest students.
2. To examine the role of authority figures (including school officials and parents) in the lives of young teens and productive and nonproductive ways in which teens will challenge those figures.
3. To identify the characteristics of emotional abuse, the

possible reasons that motivate it, and ways to deal with it.

4. To examine the causes and effects of low self-esteem and negative body image, and ways to develop more positive attitudes and feelings.
5. To discuss the conflicting pressures on teens toward conformity and individuality.
6. To analyze the role peer relationships play in teens' lives and ways to nurture those relationships.
7. To discuss other common concerns of young teens and preteens expressed in the novel, such as dating and appearance problems.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the various problems that plague Marcy, and the ways in which she deals with those problems in the course of the novel.
2. To note the effects that Ms. Finney's teaching style has on her students—Marcy in particular—and why the students respond so much more positively to Ms. Finney than to their other teachers.
3. To gain an understanding of the dysfunctional dynamics in the Lewis family.
4. To trace the ways in which Marcy's mother changes in the course of the novel.
5. To understand the reasons for the students' protest, the various adults' reaction to it, and the outcome of the protest.
6. To compare the relationship between Marcy and her parents with the relationship between Joel and his parents.
7. To identify the 1970s elements of the novel within the novel's overall timelessness.
8. To critique the novel's climactic/anticlimactic ending.

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

9. To examine the author's depiction of adults in the novel.
10. To look at the developing relationship between Marcy and Joel, and the effect of the relationship on Marcy.

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

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

**allusion:** a usually brief, often casual reference to some other person, event, or thing. In this novel, Marcy often mentions books and movies that are typically featured in ninth-grade English, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Miracle Worker*, and Sherlock Holmes.

**autobiographical novel:** a novel that draws largely from the author's own life experiences. Paula Danziger uses many elements of her own childhood and young adulthood in this novel. Like Marcy, she was an overweight child with self-esteem problems whose parents urged her to play by the rules and conform. When people complain that Marcy's father is an exaggerated stereotype—"No father would ever talk to his daughter that way!"—Danziger replies, "Wanna bet?" Danziger also based the character of Ms. Finney on herself when she was a junior high English teacher.

**climax:** the moment in a novel when the action reaches its greatest intensity and a crisis is resolved. In this novel, the climax occurs at the school board meeting when Ms. Finney gets her job back. This moment is immediately followed by Ms. Finney's resignation, an **anticlimax**, an abrupt defusing of the drama and intensity of the audience's reaction to the school board's decision. Comprehension Study Activity #9 asks students to evaluate the effectiveness of this quick shift from climax to anticlimax.

**first-person narration:** the telling of a novel or short story from the point of view and in the voice of one character. Most young adult novels use first-person narration because it is so immediate. Ask students how the novel, or parts of it, would be different in another voice, especially that of an impersonal narrator. One of the Across the Curriculum Language Arts activities asks students to write about an incident in the novel from another character's point of view.

### SETTINGS

In this novel, Danziger gives us very few specific details about time or place. We do know that events take place in a middle-class community in the early months of the school year. Marcy and her fellow students attend Dwight D. Eisenhower Junior High; it is here that they attend Ms. Finney's English class, meet after school hours for their Smedley club, protest Ms. Finney's dismissal, confront Mr. Stone in his principal's office, have lunch and detention, and attend gym class. Most of the scenes set in Marcy's comfortable home begin in the living room or dining room and usually end with Mr. Lewis yelling and driving a crying Marcy up to the sanctuary of her bedroom, where she has her own phone, TV, and stereo. Two scenes take place in Nancy's home, where the students plan their protest and Nancy hosts a party in the downstairs recreation room. The hearing on Ms. Finney's dismissal is held in the auditorium of the ironically named J. Edgar Hoover High School.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

- Stevan E. Atanasoff, *How to Survive as a Teen: When No One Understands*
- Ruth Bell, et al., *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: Revised & Updated*

Judy Blume, *Letters to Judy: What Your Kids Wish They Could Tell You*

Dianna Daniels Booher, *Making Friends with Yourself & Other Strangers*

Anne Eliot Crompton, *A Woman's Place*

Andrea Boroff Eagen, *Why Am I So Miserable If These Are the Best Years of My Life? A Survival Guide for the Young Woman*

Nora Ephron, *Teenage Romance, or How to Die of Embarrassment*

Samuel G. Freedman, *Small Victories: The Real World of a Teacher, Her Students, and Their High School*

Michael Garrett, *The Seventies*

Mel Glen, *Class Dismissed! High School Poems*

Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting* (influenced Danziger in character development)

Nat Hentoff, *American Heroes: In and Out of School* (young people defending their constitutional rights)

———, *The First Freedom: The Tumultuous History of Free Speech in America*

Laurel Holliday, ed., *Heart Songs: The Intimate Diaries of Young Girls*

Isabel Burk Mazzenga, *Compromise or Confrontation: Dealing with the Adults in Your Life*

Eve Merriam, ed., *Growing Up Female in America*

Schwartz, et al., *Will the Nurse Make Me Take My Underwear Off?*

Alan Sussman, *The Rights of Young People: An American Civil Liberties Union Handbook*

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* should include these aspects.

#### Themes

- standing up for your convictions
- parent-child communication problems
- attacking and nurturing self-esteem
- sensitivity to one's physical appearance
- creativity and the lack of it in teaching/learning
- developing an adult persona
- conformity and individuality
- developing relationships
- emotional abuse

#### Motifs

- teen dating
- worries about physical appearance
- comfort devices
- problems with gym class
- forms of student protest
- women's rights
- educational reform
- young people's rights
- shopping

### MEANING STUDY

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

1. Mom always made me go to tap and ballet lessons. (Chap. 1, p. 2)  
(Her mother made Marcy take tap dancing and ballet dancing lessons when Marcy was younger, insensitively telling Marcy that the girl needed help in overcoming her

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

*natural clumsiness. This is typical of the Lewis family dynamic, with the parents disregarding Marcy's wishes—she had wanted drum lessons instead—and underscoring Marcy's perceived inadequacies.)*

2. I personally think that he [Mr. Edwards, the former English teacher] realized that he was a horrible teacher, so he took a job somewhere as a principal or a guidance counselor. (Chap. 1, p. 3)  
*(This is a good example of why Paula Danziger appeals to her young adult readers: use of humor and wisecracking, and an anti-authority, anti-establishment attitude. Marcy is saying that principals and guidance counselors are incompetent people who are in their jobs because they're not good enough to be teachers.)*
3. Ms. Finney had on weird jewelry—giant earrings that hung down to her shoulders, and a macrame necklace. (Chap 2, p. 6)  
*(Ms. Finney is dressed in an unconventional style that makes a statement about her unconventional approach to teaching, Macrame is the art of knotting threads or cords into geometrical patterns; it was a popular craft in the 1970s. Paula Danziger favors large, dangling jewelry as well, and probably wore jewelry like this when she taught junior high English; Ms. Finney is an autobiographical character.)*
4. First of all, she'd written "Ms." Was she just trying to be sharp, or was she really into it? (Chap. 2, p. 7)  
*(This is one of a number of small details that place the novel into the context of the times when it was written, the mid-1970s. Women were just beginning to use the "Ms." form rather than "Miss" or "Mrs." Ms. Finney's use of "Ms." indicates to Marcy that this new teacher might be very hip and modern-thinking.)*
5. Ms. Finney...said that we had to use the class time to do what was in the syllabus, the guide that schools give teachers. (Chap. 3, p. 18)  
*(While Ms. Finney takes an original approach to teaching, she recognizes that she has to cover the material that the school district requires for each grade and subject. These requirements are set out in the syllabus, a summary outline of course requirements. Ms. Finney covers the required material, but does so using unusual teaching methods. For working on interpersonal relations and feelings, Ms. Finney gets the after-school club, Smedley, started.)*
6. "Your mother is president of the PTA. She will be very upset when she hears about this." (Chap. 8, p. 41)  
*(The PTA is the Parent-Teacher Association, an organized group of parents that met regularly to provide classroom support and to plan and raise money for special projects. PTAs in the mid-1970s were made up mostly of mothers and tended to be supporters of the school status quo, which is why Mr. Stone expects Marcy's mother to support him and be upset that Marcy has spoken out in support of Ms. Finney.)*
7. the Board of Education (Chap. 8, p. 42)  
*(The Board of Education is the body that sets policy for and broadly oversees the operations of a local school system. While hiring and firing individual teachers would normally be the province of an individual school's principal, controversial cases could get the Board of Educa-*

*tion involved, as happens with the case of Ms. Finney.)*

8. "His father is a radical on the school board. Goes for busing and progressive education." (Chap. 11, p. 72)  
*(Marcy's father is expressing his dislike of Joel's father's liberal views on education. Busing as a way of forcing schools to become racially integrated was a widespread and controversial policy in the 1970s. People like Mr. Lewis favored traditional rote-learning of traditional subject matter and strict discipline of students. Mr. Anderson favors the more open approach that began to spread through public schools in the 1970s, using the more creative approaches typified by Ms. Finney that stimulate student involvement and thinking.)*
9. "So now, at my age, I'm learning and you're my teacher. The world is changing...and I'm glad." (Chap. 11, p. 83)  
*(Marcy's mother is beginning to question the approach to life she has always followed up to now: do not question authority, fit in, be like everyone else, do not make waves, accept your subordinate status. Mrs. Lewis would never have protested a school principal's actions when she was a student, but she sees that students today do in fact do that sort of thing, and that it can result in good changes to the status quo. She sees the positive changes that are taking place in Marcy, and she senses that she would experience positive changes as well if she became more assertive.)*
10. "I never really thought much about women's liberation. Now I'm beginning to." (Chap 12, p. 87)  
*(Marcy's mother continues to move with the 1970s forces of social change. By the mid-1970s, the women's liberation movement was beginning to affect the attitudes of stay-at-home wives as well as working women. Mrs. Lewis is starting to stand up for herself, supporting Marcy and Ms. Finney in the face of Mr. Lewis's opposition, and then registering for college courses.)*

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

#### Literal Level Questions 1-4

1. What excuses does Marcy give to her gym teacher about what has happened to her gymsuit? Why does Marcy do this? [Creative Level: Make up five outrageous excuses of your own for why you have arrived at gym class without your gymsuit.]  
*(First, Marcy tells the gym teacher, Ms. Schmidt, that the cat ate her gymsuit. Then she says her little brother has misplaced his security blanket and is using her gymsuit as a security blanket instead. Another time, Marcy says she has been mugged on her way to school by members of a syndicate specializing in stolen gymsuits. She also says she gave her gymsuit to a poor starving orphan who needed to trade it for a bowl of rice. Marcy makes all these excuses because she does not want to have to undress in the locker room in front of all the other girls, who would then see her "mini bra and fat body." Marcy is extremely self-conscious about and ashamed of her body; she calls herself a blimp and tries to do what she can to be unnoticeable so no one will look at her body.)*
2. Why do the school principal and traditional teachers dis-

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

approve of Ms. Finney?

*(Ms. Finney is unconventional and challenges conventional wisdom and teaching methods. She wears hippie-style clothing [although not immodest] and flamboyant jewelry. She encourages her students to speak out and ask challenging questions; she does not make them raise their hands before speaking. She argues at teacher meetings and does not believe in grades. Finally, she refuses to recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning at school. Mr. Stone and the traditional teachers are threatened by having their established ways of teaching questioned and by dealing with students who are starting to think for themselves and demand input into their education.)*

3. What does Marcy not like about her life in the beginning of the novel?

*(Marcy catalogs all her dislikes and the things that make her unhappy in the opening chapter. "I hate my father. I hate school. I hate being fat." Marcy hates the way she looks and calls herself a blimp; she is unhappy at still being flat-chested. She has no friends other than Nancy Sheridan, and she thinks Nancy is only friendly because Mrs. Sheridan, who is an old friend of Marcy's mom, has ordered Nancy to be. School is boring, and school lunches are lousy. Marcy's father demeans the girl and yells at her constantly. And Mr. Stone has fired the only good teacher in the school, Ms. Finney, who had finally made school interesting and creative.)*

4. Describe the members of the Lewis family.

*(Marcy, age thirteen, has mousy brown hair, wears wire-framed glasses, and is very overweight. She suffers from low self-esteem and an extremely poor self-image. These feelings are daily reinforced by Marcy's father, Martin Lewis, who emotionally abuses each member of the family, yelling at both children and demeaning them constantly with comments such as "Why do I have to have a daughter who is stupid and so fat?" "Look at what you've done." "What are you going to be? Forty, hugging that bear and sucking your thumb?" Mr. Lewis is unable to communicate with or listen to anyone else in the family. He expects to be the absolute ruler of the family because he is the breadwinner. Marcy's mother, Lily Lewis, is a traditional, submissive housewife who acts as an enabler; unable to stop Martin from yelling at and demeaning the children, she comforts them after each of her husband's outbursts while also excusing his behavior. As the novel unfolds, though, Mrs. Lewis gains confidence and begins to assert her own character and stand up for what she thinks is right and what she wants to do. Little Stuart, age four, retreats from his father's outbursts by clinging to his teddy bear, Wolf, and sucking his thumb. Other children make fun of Stuart for his devotion to Wolf, so Stuart has few playmates. Stuart is a loving child, but we have to worry about what effect his father's abuse will have on him in the coming years.)*

### Interpretive Level Questions 5-8

5. In what ways does Marcy grow and change in the course of the novel? How does Ms. Finney prompt this change?  
*(In the beginning of the novel, Marcy has such low self-esteem that she has isolated herself from her peers: "I didn't like to embarrass anyone by having them be seen talking to me." She feels "so fat and ugly" that she is*

*"ashamed to get into a gymsuit or talk to skinny people."*

*Then Marcy gets involved in the after-school Smedley group sponsored by Ms. Finney, learns to express feelings and thoughts, and discovers that other students think she is "smart and nice, but too quiet and shy." Marcy gains so much confidence through Smedley and the interactive exercises in Ms. Finney's English class that she becomes assertive enough to speak up in Ms. Finney's defense in defiance of Mr. Stone, the school principal, and to help organize and lead a student protest about Ms. Finney being fired. Marcy also learns that other students don't all despise her for being fat, so she is finally able to feel worthy of friendship and to develop some friends, especially Joel. Marcy's mother has always urged her to find happiness by striving to be like everyone else, which has made Marcy feel miserable because she thinks she is really different. Joel helps Marcy feel comfortable and confident in thinking and acting for herself. By the novel's end, Marcy no longer sees herself as a blimp; now she is a floating helium balloon. Unfortunately, though, Marcy has not been able to improve her relationship with her father.)*

6. Compare the effect Marcy's father has had on her with the effect Joel's father has had on him.

*(Mr. Lewis's emotional abuse has contributed heavily to Marcy's low self-esteem and poor body image. Mr. Lewis blames all family problems on Marcy and calls her fat and clumsy and stupid. This has made the girl feel like an ugly loser whom no one would want for a friend. Mr. Anderson, on the other hand, works at listening to Joel and understanding his son's feelings and problems. As a result, Joel has solid self-esteem, says and does what he thinks is right, and is confident of his father's support.)*

7. What common teen problems does this novel deal with? Do you think it presents and deals with these problems in a realistic way?

*(The teen problems include peer pressure, pressure to conform, concern with weight and body image, parent-child problems and communication difficulties, self-esteem issues, teen questioning of authority and authority figures, need to establish adult identity, appearance, dating and friendships, and creativity and boredom at school. Most students will think Danziger presents these problems realistically, which is why she is such a popular young adult author.)*

8. What elements of this novel set it in the 1970s and not the 1990s?

*(The idea of student protest against administrative action is considered radical in the novel, not something students would normally do; this view of student protest was typical of the 1970s. Ms. Finney dresses and accessorizes in a seventies way, and her teaching techniques would not be considered so startling today. Marcy's mother has always accepted the very traditional family structure of husband-as-breadwinner and boss of the family and wife as subservient stay-at-home housewife, but is now starting to pick up on the ideas of the women's liberation movement, a typical scenario of the 1970s. The head of the Board of Education threatens to close the meeting to the public, which would not be legal today. Nevertheless, the teen concerns and issues are*

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

timeless, and the dialogue and Marcy's narration contain very little seventies slang or trendy expressions, so the novel does not seem at all dated in spite of its 1970s elements.)

### Critical Level Questions 9-11

9. Did you find the books' ending satisfactory? Why or why not? [Creative Level: How would you change the ending?]  
(Answers will vary. Some critics have found the ending, with Ms. Finney resigning her regained position, unsatisfactory and anticlimactic. Others think Danziger brings the important issue of Ms. Finney's dismissal to a logical conclusion.)
10. Which adults in the novel do you think are well-rounded, and which ones do you think come off as stereotypes?  
(Answers may vary somewhat. Mr. Lewis is the stereotypical emotionally abusive parent, but Danziger based him on a real person—her own father. Mr. Stone is the stereotypical rigid school administrator, concerned with the rules and maintaining control and rejecting all thoughts of innovative or creative teaching methods or student input. Marcy's mother and Ms. Finney are both well-rounded characters. Mrs. Lewis grows and changes in the course of the novel, inspired by her daughter to develop assertiveness and self-confidence. Ms. Finney shows emotion, teaching skill, empathy, and creativity. Joel's father, while sympathetic and understanding, has too limited a role in the novel to be a fully developed character.)
11. How does the author use humor to enhance the novel?  
(Breezy, light humor is a hallmark of the Danziger writing style, and young readers love it. Humor allows Danziger to keep her teen readers laughing and amused and hooked while they discover ways of dealing successfully with issues that are of serious concern to them, such as negative body image, self-esteem problems, and emotional abuse.)

### Creative Level Questions 12-14

12. Did you notice that the novel contains very few descriptive passages? It gives almost no descriptions of places or people, of anything visual. Write some paragraphs describing things like Marcy's school and home, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, Stuart, and Marcy's classmates.
13. Write a newspaper article or create a TV newscast about the Board of Education meeting and its background and outcome. Be sure to include quotes from or interviews with people involved.
14. Create and act out the scene at the end of Nancy's party, when some partygoers help her clean up, some get sick out back, and Nancy's parents arrive back home.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Art

1. Draw portraits, sketches, or caricatures of some of the novel's characters.
2. Design a different cover for the novel.
3. Illustrate one or more of your favorite scenes from the novel.
4. Design some jewelry that Ms. Finney might wear.

#### Psychology

1. Explain why young children use devices such as teddy

bears, thumb-sucking, and security blankets to comfort themselves. What kinds of comfort devices or strategies do adults use in place of these childhood comforters?

2. Record your dreams for a week and then do some psychological research to find possible meanings of the dreams.
3. Research and report on the different childhood dynamics for an only child and a child with one or more siblings.
4. Explain the possible reasons why a parent like Mr. Lewis is emotionally abusive to his or her children. What can be done to stop this abuse?

#### Science

1. Produce a class display that explains the various contact lens options available to Marcy if she wants to stop wearing her glasses.
2. Calculate the number of calories you should take in each day to maintain your ideal weight. You could do the same for members of your family. Also, develop a balanced diet plan that would provide the correct number of calories.
3. Report on the physiological effects tranquilizers have on the body, the reasons why people can become addicted to tranquilizers, and alternatives to prescription medications to relieve stress and anxiety.

#### Music

Play "Clementine" on the harmonica as Alan Smith does on Ms. Finney's first day in English class. Have some classmates sing along.

#### Mathematics

1. Figure out how much income you'd have to earn today to support Marcy's family and their lifestyle.
2. What percentage of the problem solutions that the students brainstorm on pages 65-67 of the novel do the students actually adopt?
3. What would it cost to purchase an outfit and jewelry today like the items Marcy buys on page 89 of the novel?

#### Language Arts

1. Read other novels by Paula Danziger. What common elements do you find among these books? If you read *There's a Bat in Bunk Five*, tell what further development Marcy has made in her personal life and feelings.
2. Find the source of and explain the Shakespeare quote mentioned on page 38 of the novel.
3. Read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What is Atticus talking about when he refers to walking in the shoes of another person?
4. Try some of the learning-about-books activities that Ms. Finney uses for her students on pages 32-34 of the novel: Come to school as a character in *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* (or another book) and talk about yourself and your life with other "characters"; make up a one-minute television commercial for your book; write and illustrate a children's book; produce a satirical TV show or video.
5. Using *Something About the Author*, identify the various autobiographical elements of *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*.
6. Paula Danziger has said, "For anyone who has ever felt alone—and who hasn't, in truth—a book can make a very good friend. Like a good friend, a book can help you see things a little more clearly, help you blow off steam, get you laughing, let you cry." What books that you have

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

read have been like a good friend to you?

7. Paula Danziger has said, "Kids catch it when a writer's preaching or working from a formula." What books have you read that were like this? Did you like or dislike each book?

### Social Studies

1. Marcy objects that it would not be fair to "name names" of students who had planned to protest. Research the controversy over the award given to Elia Kazan at the 1999 Academy Awards. How did this relate to "naming names"?
2. Find out when and how the use of the title "Ms." came into use.
3. The American Civil Liberties Union gives Ms. Finney its backing. What is the ACLU? Describe some of the very different cases and causes it has backed, and why.
4. The school board chairman who is conducting the hearing about Ms. Finney's dismissal threatens to close the hearing to the public if his rules are not obeyed. Would this be legal to do today? Why or why not?

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Write a letter to Dear Abby from Marcy about her terrible relationship with her father; then write Dear Abby's response.
2. Role-play a discussion between Ms. Schmidt and Marcy about Marcy's refusal to take part in gym class; the discussion needs to go beyond Marcy's outlandish excuses about her gymsuit.
3. Try creating something in macramé.
4. Put yourself in the place of Marcy and her classmates after Ms. Finney's dismissal. With your classmates, brainstorm your own ideas for responding to the dismissal of a favorite teacher at your school.
5. Describe your first date (you don't have to share this description with anyone if you don't want to). Do scenes like the living-room visit between Joel and Marcy's parents happen much any more when teens date?
6. Paula Danziger has said, "Don't forget things that were painful or embarrassing or silly. Turn them into a story that tells the truth." Do this for some episode that has occurred in your life, using a touch of light humor as Danziger does.
7. Make a list of not-too-personal things that bother you, like the list Marcy writes about on page 13 of the novel. Share with classmates. Do many people get annoyed by the same things?
8. Describe a favorite teacher, either in paragraph or list form. What makes this person a good teacher for you?
9. Compare *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* with these other young adult novels that came out in 1974: *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier, *House of Stairs* by William Sleator, and *M.C. Higgins, The Great* by Virginia Hamilton.

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Draw up a list of the important characters in the novel. Beside each name, write a character description and tell what relationship this person has with Marcy and what effect he or she has on Marcy.
2. "Middle-class kids have problems too," Marcy says. Discuss Marcy's various problems and the ways in which

she deals with them in the course of the novel. [Alternatively, ask students to discuss whether it is relevant, or "serious" enough, to devote an entire novel to middle-class teen problems like those Marcy faces.]

3. Trace the way the plot develops because of things Ms. Finney says and does or has done to her.

### OTHER WORKS BY PAULA DANZIGER

*The Pistachio Prescription* (1978)  
*Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?* (1979)  
*There's a Bat in Bunk Five* (1980)  
*The Divorce Express* (1982)  
*It's an Aardvark-Eat-Turtle World* (1985)  
*This Place Has No Atmosphere* (1986)  
*Remember Me to Harold Square* (1987)  
*Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes* (1989)  
*Make Like a Tree and Leave* (1990)  
*Earth to Matthew* (1991)  
*Not for a Billion, Gazillion Dollars* (1992)  
*Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon* (1994)  
*Thames Doesn't Rhyme with James* (1994)  
*You Can't Eat Your Chicken Pox, Amber Brown* (1995)  
*Amber Brown Goes Fourth* (1995)  
*Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit* (1996)  
*Forever Amber Brown* (1996)  
*Amber Brown Sees Red* (1997)  
*P.S. Longer Letter Later* (with Ann M. Martin, 1998)  
*Amber Brown Is Feeling Blue* (1998)

### RELATED READING

Judy Angell, *Secret Selves* and *A Word from Our Sponsor, or My Friend Alfred*  
Avi, *Nothing But the Truth*  
Joan Bauer, *Squashed*  
Judy Blume, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret; Then Again, Maybe I Won't; It's Not the End of the World; and Just As Long As We're Together*  
Ilene Cooper, *The New, Improved Gretchen Hubbard*  
Robert Cormier, *Eight Plus One* (short stories)  
William B. Crane, *Oompah*  
Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy* and *Nobody's Family Is Going to Change*  
Paula Fox, *The Stone-Faced Boy*  
Martin Godfrey, *Can You Teach Me to Pick My Nose?*  
Jan Greenberg, *The Pig Out Blues*  
Virginia Hamilton, *A Little Love*  
Nat Hentoff, *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book*  
M. E. Kerr, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!* and *I'll Love You When You're More Like Me*  
Stanley Kiesel, *The War Between the Pitiful Teachers and the Splendid Kids* and *Skinny Malinky Leads the War for Kindness*  
E. L. Konigsberg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*  
Gordon Korman, *A Semester in the Life of a Garbage Bag and The Zucchini Warriors*  
Robert Lipsyte, *One Fat Summer*  
Chris Lynch, *Slot Machine*  
Norma Fox Mazer, *Mrs. Fish, Ape, and Me*  
Patricia McKillip, *The Night Gift*  
Walter Dean Meyers, *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff* and *Mojo and the Russians*  
Betty Miles, *The Trouble with Thirteen*



## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

Emily Neville, *It's Like This, Cat*  
Suzanne Newton, *I Will Call It Georgie's Blues*  
Gary Paulsen, *The Boy Who Owned the School*  
Richard Peck, *Secrets of the Shopping Mall, Don't Look and It Won't Hurt* and the Blossom Culp series  
Daniel Pinkwater, *The Snarkout Boys and the Baconburg Horror, The Snarkout Boys and the Avocado of Death, and Author's Day*  
John R. Powers, *Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?*  
Thomas Rockwell, *How to Eat Fried Worms*  
Ivy Ruckman, *What's an Average Kid Like Me Doing Way Up Here?*  
Louis Sachar, *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*  
Marilyn Sachs, *The Fat Girl*  
J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*  
Jerry Spinelli, *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock*  
Sue Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 3/4*  
Jean Van Leeuwen, *I Was a Ninety-Eight Pound Duckling*  
Linda Woolverton, *Running Before the Wind*  
Paul Zindel, *My Darling, My Hamburger and Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "Author Bank Series: Paula Danziger," videocassette review, *School Library Journal*, May 1993, p. 61.  
*Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1990.  
*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, January 1975, p. 76.  
*The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, audio cassettes, Listening Library.  
*The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, filmstrip and cassette, Cheshire.  
Chevalier, Tracy, ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, 3d ed. Chicago/London: St. James Press, 1989.  
*Children's Literature Review*, Vol. 20. Detroit: Gale, 1990.  
"Children's Literature Web Guide," <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown>.  
*Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series*, Vol. 37. Detroit: Gale, 1992.  
*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 21. Detroit: Gale, 1982.  
Danziger, Paula, "Facets: Successful Authors Talk About Connections Between Teaching and Writing." *English Journal*, November 1984, pp. 24-27.  
———, "Why I Will Never Win the Newbery Medal." *Top of the News*, Fall 1979, pp. 57-60.  
———, "Writing for Children." *PEN Newsletter*, September 1988.  
Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Fifth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators*. NY: H.W. Wilson Co., 1983.  
*Journal of Reading*, January 1976, pp. 333-335.  
*Kirkus Reviews*, November 15, 1974, p. 1206.  
Krull, Kathleen. *Presenting Paula Danziger*, Twayne's United States Authors Series. New York: Twayne/Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995.  
*New York Times Book Review*, January 5, 1975, p. 8.  
Nilsen, Alleen Pace, and Kenneth L. Donelson. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, 2nd ed. Scott, Foresman, 1985.  
"Paula Danziger's Young Adult World," Dennis Freeland. *Writer's Digest*, January 1990, pp. 39-40, 78.  
*Publishers Weekly*, October 7, 1974, p. 62.  
*School Library Journal*, November 1974, p. 62.

Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators*. Boston/NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.  
*Something About the Author*, Vols. 36, 63, 102. Detroit: Gale, 1984, 1991, 1999.

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

### VOCABULARY TEST

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

- |                          |                  |             |                    |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| a. very talkative        | f. interruptions | k. teenage  | p. making changes  |
| b. cannot be destroyed   | g. disappointed  | l. faulty   | q. about to happen |
| c. having much knowledge | h. earlier rule  | m. loyalty  | r. not alike       |
| d. giving no name        | i. frighten      | n. twisting | s. get well        |
| e. scanned through items | j. horrible      | o. suspend  | t. hammer          |

- \_\_\_ 1. I was convinced that I'd become an adolescent blimp with wire-frame glasses, mousy brown hair, and acne.
- \_\_\_ 2. The only creative writing I could do was anonymous letters to the Student Council suggestion box.
- \_\_\_ 3. That'll teach the school to group all the smart kids in one class. We were indestructible.
- \_\_\_ 4. If you're a blimp with fears of impending acne, you go along with the crowd.
- \_\_\_ 5. "Class. I'd like to introduce you to my friend, Sherlock Houses, the defective detective."
- \_\_\_ 6. "It's a simile. A comparison of two dissimilar things using like or as."
- \_\_\_ 7. "The derivation of that philosophy obviously was influenced by a group of loquacious siblings."
- \_\_\_ 8. It made no sense, but it sounded erudite.
- \_\_\_ 9. We figured that Ms. Finney must be sick or taking a mental-health day to recuperate from teaching us.
- \_\_\_ 10. Ms. Finney has been suspended from her duties until further notice for her refusal to say the Pledge of Allegiance.
- \_\_\_ 11. "As a good American, I am chagrined to think that this type of individual is allowed to influence impressionable young people."
- \_\_\_ 12. "Listen, don't let Mr. Stone intimidate you."
- \_\_\_ 13. "Perhaps it would be best if we browsed by ourselves."
- \_\_\_ 14. Finally Joel picked out a really ugly heart-shaped pin with red, green, and orange rhinestones. It was atrocious.
- \_\_\_ 15. Mrs. Alexander wrote that Miss Finney was *warping* young minds.
- \_\_\_ 16. There was also a letter from Joel and his father, standing behind Ms. Finney, saying that she was a great *innovative* teacher.
- \_\_\_ 17. The school board president, Mr. Winston, pounded his *gavel*.
- \_\_\_ 18. "There will be no disruptions, nor will there be any cameras used."
- \_\_\_ 19. "At this time, the board will adjourn, and will return with its decision as soon as possible."
- \_\_\_ 20. "Although we do not as a group approve, there is a legal precedent to support her stand."

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

### 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. Use each name only once.

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| ___ 1. A ninth-grader who is smart, cute, and brave.                                      | a. Marcy          |
| ___ 2. An emotionally abusive father who acts like a tyrant.                              | b. Stuart         |
| ___ 3. A cuddly creature who is a great source of comfort.                                | c. Mr. Lewis      |
| ___ 4. A different kind of teacher.   | d. Mrs. Lewis     |
| ___ 5. A ninth-grader who is overweight, wears glasses,<br>and has very poor self-esteem. | e. Nancy Sheridan |
| ___ 6. A rigid, go-by-the-rules school administrator.                                     | f. Joel Anderson  |
| ___ 7. A traditional housewife who learns some assertive ways.                            | g. Barbara Finney |
| ___ 8. A father who is supportive and understanding.                                      | h. Mr. Stone      |
| ___ 9. A popular and pretty student who is Marcy's good friend.                           | i. Wolf           |
| ___ 10. A four-year-old who's often scared.   | j. Mr. Anderson   |

#### Part II: Word Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. When the events of the novel take place, Marcy is (eleven, thirteen, fifteen, seventeen) years old.
2. Marcy's mother is president of the (Board of Education, Town Council, Senior High School, PTA).
3. Marcy is embarrassed because she wears (a training bra, a girdle, sweatpants, panty hose).
4. The after-school club that Marcy, Nancy, and Joel belong to is called (the Chess Club, Smedley, Finney, Eisenhower).
5. Marcy's mother develops an interest in the (environmental, hippie, women's, antiwar) movement.
6. Marcy hates having to shop in the (Petite, Children's, Ladies, Chubbies) section of the department store.
7. Marcy accepts a (joint, cigar, beer, vodka) at the party even though she doesn't like it.
8. Joel buys a really ugly (sweater, blouse, hat, pin) for his mother as a birthday present.
9. Ms. Finney wears (low-cut blouses, miniskirts, long skirts, the school uniform).
10. Stuart is almost never separated from (Marcy, his teddy bear, his father, his security blanket).
11. Mr. Lewis blames most of the problems at home on (Stuart, Marcy, Mrs. Lewis, himself).
12. One of Marcy's favorite things is (reading books, tap dancing, gym class, talking with her father).
13. Mrs. Lewis advises Marcy often to (be herself, be aggressive, try new things, be like everyone else).
14. At the end of the novel, Ms. Finney (returns to her job, resigns from her job, is fired from her job for good, becomes the new principal).
15. Mr. Lewis likes to reward Marcy for what he thinks is good behavior by sending her (shopping, to the movies, on vacation, to her room).

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

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

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

1. Which one of her school subjects does Marcy flunk? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is the author of this novel? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What school subject does Ms. Finney teach? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What sport does Marcy not play in gym class? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What does Marcy constantly study her face in search of? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What punishment does Mr. Stone give Marcy, Joel, Nancy, and Robert for leading the student protest?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
7. Which young character in the novel has parents who are divorced? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What comfort food does Mrs. Lewis offer Marcy and Stuart when they are upset? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What does Stuart fill up his teddy bear with? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What job does Mr. Stone have at the school? \_\_\_\_\_

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any three topics to write about. Write a paragraph for each, and write in complete sentences.

1. What does Marcy dislike about herself and her life?
2. What effects does Ms. Finney have on Marcy?
3. How do Marcy and Stuart help each other?
4. Compare Marcy's family situation with Joel's family situation.

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

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

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. Names may be used more than once.

- a. Marcy                      c. Mr. (Martin) Lewis                      e. Nancy Sheridan                      g. Barbara Finney                      i. Mr. Anderson  
b. Stuart                      d. Mrs. (Lily) Lewis                      f. Joel Anderson                      h. Mr. Stone

- \_\_\_\_ 1. "You know, it'll be great when that Miss Finney gets fired. It'll teach both of you not to get involved in bleeding-heart causes."  
\_\_\_\_ 2. "Marcy, you don't have to drink just because everyone does. Look, you're different. That's cool."  
\_\_\_\_ 3. "I have called your parents here to discuss your plot to undermine my school."  
\_\_\_\_ 4. "I love Wolf. He's my friend. He never yells at me."  
\_\_\_\_ 5. "I don't think it's a crime to dress differently. As for teaching differently, that's very true. I'm not at all ashamed of that."  
\_\_\_\_ 6. "Honey, I'm sorry it's like this. You've got to learn to live with it. I'm sorry. I love you very much."  
\_\_\_\_ 7. "I know this is very hard for you. You trusted Ms. Finney and you feel that she's left you...just like your mother did."  
\_\_\_\_ 8. "I hate you! Just leave me alone."  
\_\_\_\_ 9. "Look at what you've done. We'd never fight if it weren't for you. Apologize."  
\_\_\_\_ 10. "My parents went to a movie. I told them I was old enough to not have chaperones. So they gave in. They're cool."

#### Part II: Word Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

- Marcy thinks of herself as ugly and (neurotic, skinny, fat, stupid).
- Ms. Finney teaches (French, Spanish, Math, English).
- When she is upset, Mrs. Lewis uses (chocolate, alcohol, tranquilizers, yoga) to calm down.
- Marcy attends (elementary, junior high, senior high, private) school.
- Mr. Lewis is guilty of (emotional, physical, sexual, no) abuse of his children.
- On her very first date ever, Marcy goes with Joel to (a party, the movies, the park, a play).
- Mrs. Lewis writes a(n) (opinion column, letter to the editor, news article, movie review) for the local newspaper.
- Marcy buys a (purple, yellow, black, striped) pants suit to wear to Nancy's party.
- Joel is very (lazy, dumb, smart, funny-looking).
- One day, Ms. Finney plays a game of (softball, volleyball, soccer, field hockey) with the girls' gym class.
- Smedley is a(n) (classmate of Marcy's, teacher, principal, after-school club).
- When Mr. Lewis interacts with his kids, he usually (yells at them, listens to them, hits them, plays with them).
- Mr. Lewis's advice for success in life is to (be yourself, be assertive, play by the rules, be sneaky).
- (Joel, Joel's father, Joel's mother, Joel's grandmother) does not live at the Anderson home.
- At school, Marcy clashes with (Ms. Finney, Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Sheridan, Mr. Stone).

## THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT

### Part III: Fill-In (20 points)

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

1. Ms. Finney wants to teach students how to \_\_\_\_\_ with one another.
2. The public meeting about Ms. Finney's dismissal is held by the Board of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Much to the surprise of her parents, Marcy helps lead a student \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Overweight Marcy usually describes herself as a \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Marcy avoids taking part in gym class by never bringing her \_\_\_\_\_ to class.
6. Stuart's teddy bear is named \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Stuart comforts himself with his teddy bear and his habit of \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Ms. Finney gets in trouble for refusing to say the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Marcy wanted drum lessons, but her mother made her take \_\_\_\_\_ lessons instead.
10. Marcy worries that she will look like a huge \_\_\_\_\_ in her purple pants suit.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any three topics to write about. Write a paragraph for each, and write in complete sentences.

1. Describe Marcy and Joel's friendship. How does the friendship help Marcy?
2. How does Marcy's mother change in the course of the novel?
3. Why is Ms. Finney dismissed from her job? Why does she resign from the job once she is reinstated?
4. Who encourages Marcy to communicate with other people? Who discourages her from doing this, and how?

**THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT**

**ANSWER KEY**

**VOCABULARY TEST**

- |      |       |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. k | 6. r  | 11. g | 16. p |
| 2. d | 7. a  | 12. i | 17. t |
| 3. b | 8. c  | 13. e | 18. f |
| 4. q | 9. s  | 14. j | 19. o |
| 5. l | 10. m | 15. n | 20. h |

**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

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

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. f | 6. h  |
| 2. c | 7. d  |
| 3. i | 8. j  |
| 4. g | 9. e  |
| 5. a | 10. b |

**Part II: Word Choice (30 points)**

- |                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. thirteen       | 9. long skirts            |
| 2. PTA            | 10. his teddy bear        |
| 3. a training bra | 11. Marcy                 |
| 4. Smedley        | 12. reading books         |
| 5. women's        | 13. be like everyone else |
| 6. Chubbies       | 14. resigns from her job  |
| 7. beer           | 15. shopping              |
| 8. pin            |                           |

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

- |                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. gym            | 6. suspension  |
| 2. Paula Danziger | 7. Joel        |
| 3. English        | 8. ice cream   |
| 4. volleyball     | 9. orange pits |
| 5. acne/pimples   | 10. principal  |

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

Answers will vary.

**COMPREHENSION TEST B**

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

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. d  |
| 2. f | 7. i  |
| 3. h | 8. a  |
| 4. b | 9. c  |
| 5. g | 10. e |

**Part II: Word Choice (30 points)**

- |                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. fat                  | 9. smart              |
| 2. English              | 10. volleyball        |
| 3. tranquilizers        | 11. after-school club |
| 4. junior high          | 12. yells at them     |
| 5. emotional            | 13. play by the rules |
| 6. a party              | 14. Joel's mother     |
| 7. letter to the editor | 15. Mr. Stone         |
| 8. purple               |                       |

**Part III: Fill-In (20 points)**

- |                |                           |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. communicate | 6. Wolf                   |
| 2. Education   | 7. thumb-sucking          |
| 3. protest     | 8. Pledge [of] Allegiance |
| 4. blimp       | 9. dancing (tap, ballet)  |
| 5. gymsuit     | 10. grape                 |

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

Answers will vary.



**THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY**

PERMA-BOUND BOOKS • 617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650

Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169

E-mail: [books@perma-bound.com](mailto:books@perma-bound.com)

PERMA-BOUND CANADA • Box 517, Station A • Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1

Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811

E-mail: [perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca](mailto:perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca)

VISIT OUR WEB SITE: <http://www.perma-bound.com>