



A Corner of the Universe

by Ann M. Martin

Teacher's Guide

Written By Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

PERMA-BOUND
THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY

CLASSROOM

A Perma-Bound Production

This guide was prepared using the Scholastic edition, ©2002. Other editions may differ.

Synopsis

Preface

The novel is set in the summer of 1960 in the small town of Millerton. In the present, the narrator, thirteen-year-old Hattie (Harriet) Owen, is watching home movies and remembering the previous summer when she met her Uncle Adam for the first time. Hattie and her parents run a boarding house. Their boarders are elderly Miss Hagerty, former clock-maker Mr. Penny, and the beautiful bank clerk Angel Valentine. The boarders are as much a part of the family as Hattie's grandparents.

Chapter 1

In a flashback, Hattie, now eleven years old, has been anticipating a summer as comfortably uneventful as all the others ("I just want things all safe and familiar," she admits), helping her mother run their boarding house, painting alongside her artist father, and reading piles of books. Hattie's maternal grandparents, Nana and Papa, are wealthy and important members of the community. They feel that Hattie's mother has married beneath her because Hattie's father doesn't support them as he pursues his art. As a result, Hattie's parents run the boarding house.

Chapter 2

Hattie is a shy loner. Her relationship with her mother is sometimes difficult because they always negotiate clothing and behavior to suit the wealthy, overbearing Nana. Hattie's sole friend is Betsy, who is gone for the summer on a family vacation. Hattie is excited that the Fred Carmel Carnival is coming to town.

Chapter 3

Hattie is suspicious when her grandmother shows up at the boarding house. Sure enough, Nana has an ulterior motive: she wants Hattie to attend the "Summer

Cotillion" on July 15th. Hattie detests such events because she is inevitably a wallflower.

Chapter 4

In a shocking revelation, Mom tells Hattie that in addition to her older brother Hayden, Mom has a twenty-one-year-old brother named Adam. He has been in a special school because he has "mental problems": he has been diagnosed as autistic and/or schizophrenic. His school is closing, so Adam is coming home to stay with Nana and Papa for a while. Hattie realizes that Adam is not part of the perfect world that Nana has tried so hard to create.

Chapter 5

Hattie meets Adam. He speaks in a torrent of words, quoting huge swaths of dialogue from *Love Lucy* shows verbatim. Dinner is awkward: Adam eats too fast and Nana berates him.

Chapter 6

After some discussion, Adam stays with Hattie's family while Nana and Papa go to church. Adam knows all the boarders, and Papa makes a

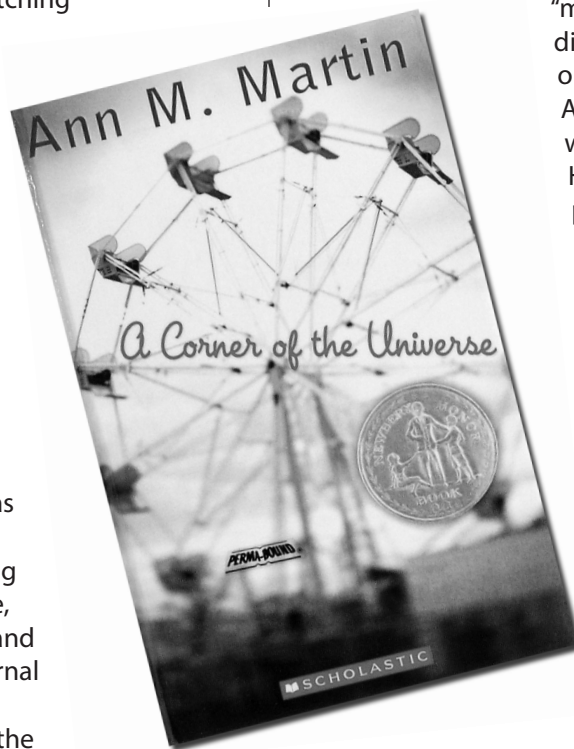
home movie. Nancy and Janet, two of Hattie's classmates, mock Adam for being different, which infuriates Hattie.

Chapter 7

Adam, much taken with Angel Valentine, walks to Hattie's house to see her, but she has already left for work. Hattie secretly wonders if she and Adam might be kindred spirits.

Chapter 8

Adam can't take his eyes off Angel's bosom. A savant, Adam can tell what day of the week any date falls on. The next morning, Hattie sees Adam walking down the street wearing only his pajama bottoms and hurries to bring him home. Nancy calls Adam a "freak." Hattie's grandparents act embarrassed whenever he is around.



Chapter 9

The carnival comes to town, and Hattie attends with her parents. They refuse to let Adam come along with them. Angel goes with her handsome date. The ticket-taker, a girl Hattie's age, strikes up a conversation with Hattie.

Chapter 10

Back at the carnival the next day, Hattie talks to the girl from the previous night. Her name is Leila Cahn, and she is part of the carnival "family." Her mother is the "pretzel woman" in the sideshow. Hattie and Leila become friends. Leila is kind and compassionate, mature beyond her years, and comfortable with her family's work and lifestyle.

Chapter 11

The community July 4th picnic does not go well because Adam wants ice cream rather than pie. People mock him, and Hattie fears that whatever disability Adam has, she has as well. She also worries that Adam's condition is hereditary and can be passed down to her own children.

Chapter 12

Leila treats Hattie to various attractions at the carnival.

Chapter 13

Angel tells Hattie that her handsome boyfriend is Henry. Adam and Leila decide to give Hattie a birthday party, but they schedule it for the same day as the Summer Cotillion. Hattie leaves the conflict to Nana to resolve, and Nana agrees that Hattie can attend the party rather than the dance.

Chapter 14

Adam again misbehaves at dinner and Nana banishes him from the table, to his great distress. Adam and Leila have their birthday party for Hattie at the carnival. Adam gives Hattie a beautiful box that he has made for her.

Chapter 15

Hattie's family party is wrecked when Adam eats the roses off the birthday cake. Nana and Papa give a fancy dinner party and Hattie and Leila decide to use the occasion to sneak Adam out of the house and to the carnival. They know they cannot take Adam without permission but they want him to have fun as everyone else does. Adam hates and fears rides but decides to ride the Ferris wheel. When the ride gets stuck, Adam panics and starts to shriek.

Chapter 16

Adam gets out of the Ferris wheel car and climbs onto the struts. The Cahns and other passengers try to calm him, but to no avail. He, Hattie, and Leila narrowly avoid serious injury. The police put Adam in a straight jacket and handcuffs and take him to the hospital.

Chapter 17

Hattie's parents and grandparents are furious at her for disobeying and forbid her to go to the carnival again. Adam is released from the hospital after twenty-four hours. The Strowsky family arrives: the mother and her children Catherine and Sam. They are relocating after the father's sudden death. Even though there is almost no room left at the boarding house, Hattie's parents take them in and waive the first month's rent.

Chapter 18

Catherine is even more shy than Hattie. Adam arrives with flowers for Angel and bursts into her room, where she and Henry are in bed together. Adam is transfixed by the sight of Angel's bare chest.

Chapter 19

Hattie finally gets back to the carnival and finds it packing up. Leila has already gone on. Hattie is crushed that she never had a chance to explain what happened with Adam, absolve Leila of blame, and say goodbye. The police arrive at Nana's house because Adam is missing. They find him later: He has hanged himself in the shed.

Chapter 20

Mama's other brother, Hayden, arrives for the funeral. He did not even know that Adam was home, showing the lack of communication in the family.

Chapter 21

Adam is buried and Hattie delivers a eulogy at the funeral. Afterward, Hattie goes to Adam's room, where she sees Nana sitting all alone. Hattie understands that she and Adam are not very much alike at all. She also understands that her mother loved Adam very much, sending him a gift or letter every single week he was away, for decades.

Chapter 22

Hattie and her parents take their first vacation ever. They talk about Adam. At school, Hattie, Catherine, and Betsy all become close friends. Hattie writes a letter to Leila explaining what happened. Hattie watches more home movies and realizes that life is all about changing what's handed to you.

Author Sketch

Ann M(atthews) Martin was born in 1955 in Princeton, NJ. Her father was a cartoonist; her mother, a teacher. In an interview with Kristin McMurrin of *People Weekly*, Martin described her childhood: "I was moody and temperamental, but those were very happy years . . . because I had parents who would . . . teach us magic tricks and roast marshmallows in the woods with us. They never cared if we made a mess. My mother called our playroom 'toy soup.'"



Martin earned her undergraduate degree with honors from Smith College in 1977. Then she worked as an elementary school teacher in Noroton, Conn., with students who had learning disabilities such as dyslexia. After a year, she left teaching and turned to publishing, working first as an editorial assistant for Archway Paperbacks (1978-80). She next moved to Scholastic, where she worked as a copywriter for the *Teen Age Book Club* for a year, quickly moving up to associate editor (1981-83), editor (1983), and senior editor (1983-85). While still on staff, Martin published her first book, *Bummer Summer*. A popular story for young readers, the novel describes an overnight camp experience. In 1985, Martin quit her staff job and became a full-time freelance writer. She published a steady stream of children's novels, most notably the wildly popular "Baby-Sitters Club" series.

By the time the last "Baby-Sitters Club" book was published in 2000, Martin had become one of the most successful children's book authors in the world. Over 180 million books had been sold, including over 130 of the original "Baby-Sitters Club" editions as well as 120 more titles in the "Little Sisters" series, twenty-five books in the "Mystery" series, thirteen "BSC Friends Forever" titles, fifteen in the "California Diaries" series, dozens of titles in super editions, and twelve titles in the "Kids in Ms. Colman's Class" series. From the outset the series was a collaborative effort. Martin wrote some of the books herself but turned many over to freelancers.

In addition to writing, Martin is very active in supporting various community activities. She is co-founder of the Lisa Novak Community Libraries. She is the founder of the Ann M. Martin Foundation, which benefits children, education and literacy programs, and homeless people and animals.

Critic's Corner

A Corner of the Universe was named a Newbery Honor book in 2003 and reviews were highly laudatory. *Publishers Weekly*, for instance, said: "With characteristic tenderness and wisdom, the author portrays the complex relationship between the sympathetic heroine and her uncle. . . . Readers will relate to Hattie's fear of being as 'different' as Adam, and will admire her willingness to befriend an outcast. Hearts will go out to both Hattie and Adam as they step outside the confines of their familiar world to meet some painful challenges."

Cindy Darling Codell, reviewing the novel for *School Library Journal*, was equally enthusiastic. She wrote: "Martin delivers wonderfully real characters and an engrossing plot through the viewpoint of a girl who tries so earnestly to connect with those around her. This is an important story."

Ilene Cooper, the *Booklist* critic, said: "It is Martin's characters that shine, especially Hattie, who is trying to feel her way through family secrets, and Adam, whose valiant efforts to forge a life for himself are as uplifting as his failures are heartrending. The supporting characters are strong pillars that hold up the rest of the story, and their subtle depictions provide a depth that makes it much more than a 'problem novel.' This is a fully realized roller coaster of emotions, and readers take the ride right along with Hattie."

Other Books by Ann M. Martin

Bummer Summer (1983)
Just You and Me (1983)
 (With Betsy Ryan) *My Puppy Scrapbook* (1983)
Inside Out (1984)
Stage Fright (1984)
Me and Katie (the Pest) (1985)
With You and Without You (1986)
Missing Since Monday (1986)
Just a Summer Romance (1987)
Slam Book (1987)
Yours Turly Shirley (1988)
Ten Kids No Pets (1988)
Fancy Dance in Feather Town (1988)
Ma and Pa Dracula (1989)
Moving Day in Feather Town (1989)
Eleven Kids One Summer (1991)
Enchanted Attic (1992)
Rachel Parker Kindergarten Show-off (With Nancy Poydar) (1992)

Chain Letter (1993)

(With Margot Becker) *Ann M Martin: The Story of the Author of the Baby-Sitters Club* (1993)

Leo the Magnificat (1996)

(With Paula Danziger) *P.S. Longer Letter Later* (1998)

(With Laura Godwin) *The Doll People* (1999)

(With Paula Danziger) *Snail Mail No More* (2000)

Belle Teal (2001)

A Corner of the Universe (2002)

(With Laura Godwin) *The Meanest Doll in the World* (sequel to *The Doll People*) (2003)

In addition, Martin is credited with the following series:

"Baby-Sitters Club" series

"Friends Forever" series

"Friends Forever Special" series

"Baby-Sitters Club Mystery" series

"Baby-Sitters Club Super Specials" series

"Baby-Sitters Little Sisters" series

"Baby-Sitters Little Sisters Super Special" series

"Baby-Sitters Club Portrait Collection" series

"Baby-Sitters Club Super Mysteries" series

"Baby-Sitters Club" Special Editions

"The Kids In Ms Colman's Class" series

Charles Tang "California Diaries" series

Bibliography

Booklist, September 1, 1996, Stephanie Zvirin, review of *Leo the Magnificat*, p. 143; June 1, 1998, Hazel Rochman, review of *P.S. Longer Letter Later*, p. 1765; November 1, 1999, p. 550; March 15, 2000, Michael Cart, review of *Snail Mail No More*, p. 1376, August, 2000, p. 2140.

Book Report, September-October, 1998, p. 51.

Curriculum Review, February, 1995, p. 13.

Emergency Librarian, March-April, 1991, p. 39.

Family Life, August, 1998, p. 89.

New York Times Book Review, April 27, 1986, p. 25; August 14, 1988, p. 28; April 30, 1989, p. 42; May 17, 1998, p. 27.

People Weekly, August 21, 1989, Kristin McMurrin, "Ann Martin Stirs up a Tiny Tempest in Preteen Land with Her Bestselling 'Baby-Sitters Club,'" pp. 55-56.

Publishers Weekly, June 17, 1988, p. 37; August 23, 1991, review of *Eleven Kids, One Summer*, p. 62; September 13, 1993, p. 137; May 17, 1993, p. 34; November 21, 1994, p. 42; September 4, 1995, pp. 28-29; September 2, 1996, review of *Leo the Magnificat*, p. 131; September 1, 1997, Sally Lodge, "Another Busy Season for Ann M. Martin," pp. 31-32; February 16, 1998, review of *P.S. Longer Letter Later*, p. 212; March 9, 1998, Lynda Drill Comerford, "A True Test of Friendship," p. 26; June 7, 1999, review of *P.S. Longer Letter Later*, p. 53; July 19, 1999,

p. 197; January 10, 2000, review of *Snail Mail No More*, p. 68; March 6, 2000, p. 112; July 3, 2000, review of *The Doll People*, p. 71; October 30, 2000, p. 37.

School Library Journal, May, 1998, Renee Steinberg, review of *P.S. Longer Letter Later*, p. 141; March, 2000, Linda Bindner, review of *Snail Mail No More*, p. 234; November, 2000, Kathie Meizner, review of *The Doll People*, p. 128; December, 2000, p. 54.

Time, June 11, 1990, "Wake-up Call," p. 75.

U.S. News & World Report, November 13, 2000, p. 18.

Washington Post, August 17, 1995, p. C1.

General Objectives

1. To analyze life in a small town in the 1960s
2. To explore the Owen family structure
3. To assess each character's personality
4. To trace the sequence of events
5. To describe how Hattie accepts Adam
6. To evaluate how Hattie's grandparents deal with their youngest son
7. To find examples of compassion
8. To understand autism
9. To recognize the significance of setting
10. To describe the novel's ending

Specific Objectives

1. To understand why Hattie likes living in Millerton so much
2. To probe what brought Hattie's parents together and why they are happily married, despite Nana's disapproval
3. To determine how the boarders function as part of Hattie's extended family
4. To understand Adam's disability
5. To comprehend why Nana and Papa sent Adam away to school
6. To evaluate Nana's drive to have a perfect family
7. To probe why Hattie initially identifies with Adam
8. To probe why Hattie takes Adam to the carnival, even though she knows it is forbidden
9. To appreciate Hattie's maturity
10. To explore why Adam hangs himself

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Ann M. Martin's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Description: a word picture of what something or someone is like. Description is made up of sensory details that help readers form pictures in their minds. Ann M. Martin uses a lot of description in *A Corner of the Universe* to help readers visualize the time and place. This is evident from the very first paragraph in Chapter 1: “On early summer mornings, Millerton is as sleepy town, the houses nodding in the heavy air.” This is very similar to the description in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and can be seen as paying homage to that seminal novel.

Point of view: the position from which a story is told. *A Corner of the Universe* is told from the first-person point of view, through Hattie’s eyes. Hattie is one of the characters in the story and she explains the events through her own eyes, using the pronouns I and me. By showing events only through the filter of Hattie’s consciousness, readers have to fill in the gaps in the narrative themselves. For instance, we have to decide for ourselves what Adam really feels.

Flashback: a scene that breaks into the story to show an earlier part of the action. Flashbacks help fill in missing information, explain the characters’ actions, and advance the plot. All but the first and last parts of *A Corner of the Universe* are a flashback, as Hattie recalls the events of the previous summer. By using a flashback, the author allows Hattie to process the traumatic events of her uncle’s death and make some sense of them and his life.

The Importance of Setting

A Corner of the Universe is set in the small town of Millerton in 1960. There are several Millertons in the United States, but since none is specified in the novel, readers can only assume that the setting is fictional. This gives it a universality that an actual place would lack: we can believe that all small towns in 1960 were similar to Millerton.

In a small town in 1960, the arrival of the carnival would be an occasion of great excitement, as we see in this novel. Holidays would be celebrated with great fanfare, again as we see here. Finally, some families would be of higher social class than others and enjoy the small rights and privileges that accompany elevated status. We see this, for instance, when Papa is able to get Adam released from the hospital after only twenty-four hours. The incident is quickly hushed over so as not to cause the Mercers—and by association, the town—embarrassment.

A Corner of the Universe could be set in any small town at this time, since prejudices against the mentally ill were commonplace then, as they tragically still are in many towns today.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Books

Richard Carlson, *Poems and Short Stories about My Brother Kevin Who Has Autism: Entertainment for Boys and Girls Ages 6 to 10*
 Gennifer Choldenko, *Al Capone Does My Shirts*
 Alexandra Day, *The Flight of a Dove*
 Andrea Edwards, *Taking Autism to School*
 Becky Edwards, *My Brother Sammy*
 Leslie Ely, *Looking After Louis*
 Illana Katz, *Joey and Sam: A Heartwarming Storybook about Autism, a Family, and a Brother’s Love*
 Laurie Lears, *Ian’s Walk: A Story about Autism*
 Ann M. Martin, *Kristy and the Secret of Susan*
 Rodman Philbrick, *Freak The Mighty*
 Celia Rees, *The Truth Out There*
 Colby Rodowsky, *Clay*
 Mary Thompson, *Andy and his Yellow Frisbee*
 Terry Trueman, *Stuck in Neutral*
 Debi Tyree, *Jessica’s Little Sister: A Story About Autism*
 Nancy Werlin, *Are You Alone on Purpose?*
 Ruth White, *Memories of Summer*

Audio

A Corner of the Universe (Audiofile)

DVDs and Videos

A Beautiful Mind
Jack the Bear
Forrest Gump
Freak the Mighty
Good Will Hunting
Max the Mighty
Simon Birch

Media

The Baby-Sitters Club television series was produced by Scholastic Productions and broadcast on Home Box Office (HBO) and the Disney Channel.
The Baby-Sitters Club Movie co-produced by Scholastic Productions and Beacon Communications was distributed by Columbia 1995.
 A “Baby-Sitters Club” board game has been released by Milton-Bradley.
 Several “Baby-Sitters Club” stories have appeared on video and audio-cassette.

Internet

Ann M. Martin

www.scholastic.com/annmartin

Kidsreads.com - Ann M. Martin

www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-martin-ann.asp

Ann M. Martin

www2.lhric.org/pocantico/womenenc/martin.htm

Ann M Martin

www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/m/ann-m-martin

Ann Martin - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia...

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_M._Martin

Ann M. Martin: Transcript of Live Chat, July 6, 2004...

www.nypl.org/chat/AnnMMartin.html

Ann Martin Teacher Resource File...

falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/annmartin.htm

Ann M. Martin: A Friend Forever

www.kidspoint.org/columns2.asp?column_id=1051&column_type=author

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Ann M. Martin's *A Corner of the Universe* should include these aspects:

Themes

- art
- autism
- boarding houses
- carnivals
- communication
- home movies
- friendship
- social climbing
- small town life
- suicide

Motifs

- being an artist rather than working a conventional job
- dealing with autism and other neurological disorders
- dealing with the pain of being shunned and mocked

- running a boarding house
- thrilling over a carnival
- learning the importance of talking to your relatives about family issues, especially family secrets
- making and keeping close friends
- wanting to be superior to your neighbors and have a "perfect" and enviable life
- living in a small town where everyone knows you and your personal affairs
- dealing with the suicide of a relative

Meaning Study

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

1. She sighs. "Your uncle Hayden and I have another brother," she says at last. "Adam. Your uncle Adam." (Chapter 4, p. 30)
(Hattie is shocked when her mother tells her that she has another uncle. Mama tries to avoid specifics, but finally admits that her parents sent Adam away because he has what she calls "mental problems." This is the inciting incident that sets off the plot.)
2. "Some days, I say, 'I feel like I don't belong anywhere in the world. The world out there. I point to Grant. 'People walk down our street and people drive down it and ride their bicycles down it and all of them, even the ones I know, could be from another planet. And I'm a visiting alien.'" (Chapter 7, p. 58)
(Hattie voices the feeling that nearly all adolescents have at one time or another, their alienation from others. Hattie feels this way because she is very shy and her parents run a boarding house, which is unusual in her small town. Adam agrees with Hattie, but he really is different. Hattie identifies very closely with Adam. Later, Hattie comes to see that she and Adam are not that similar after all.)
3. "It's people like Chimp Boy and Baby Tess I worry about. People stare at them because of the way they were born. (Chapter 12, p. 96)
(Here, Leila tells Hattie that most of the "freaks" are fake, people putting on an act to make a living. However, a few of the people in the sideshow do have birth defects. The "freak show" parallels Adam's tragic situation, as his parents hid him away to prevent embarrassment. Martin delivers this sad but true commentary on our lack of compassion and understanding toward those who

are different from the norm.)

4. "No one knows," says Adam, "what it is like."
(Chapter 14, p. 112)
(For the first time, readers see Adam's pain at being different, at being subject to the ridicule of others. We also see with heart-wrenching emotion that he cannot help the way that he behaves and that he would give anything to be able to act as others do.)
5. Adam says softly, "It's Neverland, it's Oz, it's Nirvana. Oh, it's the center of the universe."
(Chapter 15, p. 130)
(Adam is referring to the splendor of the Ferris wheel at night. Tragically, the ride sets off his final breakdown. When combined with his realization that he can never have a woman like Angel Valentine—or any normal love relationship—he falls apart and commits suicide.)
6. I look at Adam now and see that he is terrified, terrified, terrified. How often has he felt like this?
(Chapter 16, p. 136)
(Adam's dramatic breakdown on the Ferris wheel is just an extreme manifestation of his everyday terror. Minor annoyances, which most people brush off, can send a mentally ill person—especially one with autism—into an abyss of terror. This incident gives readers a glimpse into Adam's pain and makes his suicide more understandable, in light of his extreme pain.)
7. "He hung himself. In the shed behind Nana and Papa's." (Chapter 19, p. 164)
(Martin uses short, abrupt sentences to capture the horror of Adam's death. This stylistic device helps readers see how the news strikes Hattie as a punch in the gut.)
8. "I am Adam Mercer's niece," I say again. "And I want you to know that Adam was not a freak."
(Chapter 21, p. 177)
(Furious that her classmates Nancy and Janet have come to Adam's funeral simply to gawk and mock, Hattie makes this declaration in her eulogy. By standing up for Adam, Hattie shows her compassion and humanity.)
9. "Your mother sent him something every week," she says. (Chapter 21, p. 179)
(Hattie was under the misapprehension that her mother did not love Adam. Nothing could be further from the truth: Mama loved Adam very much, and he was always in her thoughts. We can see this because she sent him a small gift or letter every week. Martin suggests that our actions as much as our words communicate our feelings.)

10. It's all about changing what's handed to you, about poking around a little, lifting the corners, seeing what's underneath, poking that.
(Chapter 22, p. 189)
(The last lines in the novel echo and explain the title. People must shape their reality. Sometimes things work out and other times they don't, but the effort is what matters. This is the novel's theme.)

Comprehension Study

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

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Who is Adam?
(Adam is Hattie's uncle. He is her mother's much-younger brother.)
2. What is wrong with Adam?
(He is autistic, suffering from a neurological disorder.)
3. How does Nana feel about Adam?
(On one hand, she loves him very much because he is her son. On the other, she is deeply embarrassed by his disorder because she wants a perfect family, and he mars that.)
4. What happens to Adam on the Ferris wheel?
(The wheel breaks down and stops. Adam panics and climbs out of the car. He tries to climb down the struts to safety.)
5. What happens when Adam barges into Angel's room, carrying flowers for her?
(Adam surprises Angel in bed with her boyfriend. He sees her naked from the waist up. Although Angel is gentle toward him and compassionate, Adam realizes that she will never love him as he loves her. She has no romantic feelings for him at all.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why does Hattie take Adam on the Ferris wheel?
(She wants to give Adam a taste of real life, free from restrictions. She also wants to disobey her parents and grandparents, since she is always the "perfect" child. On another level, perhaps she wants to prove to everyone, especially to grandparents, parents, and Adam, that Adam is "normal," when of course he is not.)
7. In what ways is Hattie similar to Adam? Why is she different?

(They both feel they don't fit in. They feel they are unique. The difference is that Adam really does not fit in and Hattie has friends.)

8. Why does Adam kill himself?
(In tremendous anguish because of his inability to get along in everyday life, he realized that he will always be a "freak." He wanted to end his pain and suffering.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Did you find the ending logical and believable? Why or why not?
(The ending is both logical and believable because mentally ill people do sometimes make suicide attempts, and some succeed. Further, in 1960, there were no treatments for autism, so there would not have been a way for Adam to get any better.)
10. What parts of this book did you find especially sad?
(Adam's pain is especially sad. It is tragic that he feels Angel might love him, when readers know that it is never possible.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Hold a roundtable discussion in which you debate whether or not Adam should have been sent to a residential school in the first place.
12. List five gifts that you would send to Adam. Explain how each gift would please him.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

- After Adam's death, Nana shows Hattie his treasure box. Create a treasure box for Hattie or yourself.
- Adam memorizes dialogue from *I Love Lucy*. The male lead, Desi Arnez, was a noted musician. Share some of his songs with the class. Describe the style of music he played.
- Using scenes from the novel, create a mural of the main events.
- Draw or paint a new cover for *A Corner of the Universe*.
- Imagine you are creating a movie of *A Corner of the Universe*. Choose background music for three especially dramatic scenes.

Language Arts

- Hattie thinks that Adam must feel like Rip Van Winkle. Read the short story "Rip Van Winkle" by Washington Irving and then explain the allusion.
- Hattie and her parents talk about what Adam taught them. Write three things that Adam taught you.
- Create a comparison/contrast chart showing how Hattie is similar to and different from Adam.
- Write a poem from Adam's point of view, showing how he felt about being different from others.
- Write Adam's obituary for the Millerton newspaper.
- Hattie writes a letter to Leila explaining what happened. Write this letter.
- Martin's novel *Kristy and the Secret of Susan* deals with an autistic savant. Read the book and describe what light it sheds on the character of Adam.
- Describing her use of the past in her writings, Martin once commented, "Some of my books have been based on past experiences, although very few of them have been based on actual events in my childhood." Explain what "actual event" Martin used as the basis of *A Corner of the Universe*.

History/Social Studies

- In an essay, compare and contrast your town to Millerton.
- As Hattie explains in Chapter 2, the boarding house has three rules. Write at least five rules for your house.
- Adam is fixated on the old television show *I Love Lucy*. Watch the show and explain its appeal. What made it so popular?
- Hattie's father went to Yale, a college in the Ivy League. List all eight colleges in the Ivy League and find out how they got this name. Then choose one of the eight colleges and explain its requirements for admission.
- Miss Hagerty is a Presbyterian, while Nana and Papa are Episcopalians. Explain what Presbyterians

and Episcopalians believe. How are their beliefs similar and different?

6. The family is part of the town's large July 4th celebration. In an essay, explain what historical event July 4th commemorates.

Science/Math

1. Adam probably has autism. Research the current thinking about the causes and treatments for this neurological condition.
2. Hattie makes breakfast every day for Miss Hagerty. Create a menu of seven healthful breakfasts for someone your age. Then prepare and eat each breakfast for a week.
3. Hattie worries that Adam's disability is hereditary. Using a Mendelian square, explain how a hereditary condition such as hemophilia is passed down through the generations.
4. Make a chart showing the increase in reported cases of autism in America in the past ten years.

Speech/Drama

1. Hattie's father makes a lot of home movies. Make a movie of your family to share with the class.
2. In a roundtable discussion, explore how Hattie can deal with cruel people who mock her uncle. For example, should she ignore them or respond to their taunts?
3. Nana wants Hattie to attend the "Summer Cotillion." Organize a "Cotillion" of your own in class.
4. Hattie's mother believes that she and Hattie's father are "soul mates." Is there a scientific basis for romantic attraction? Research this and present your findings in a poster or web page.
5. Meals with Adam are awkward: Adam eats too fast and Nana berates him. Model good table manners for a small group of classmates.
6. Hattie delivers a eulogy at Adam's funeral. Writing as Mama or Nana, write your own eulogy for Adam. Deliver it to the class.

Alternate Assessment

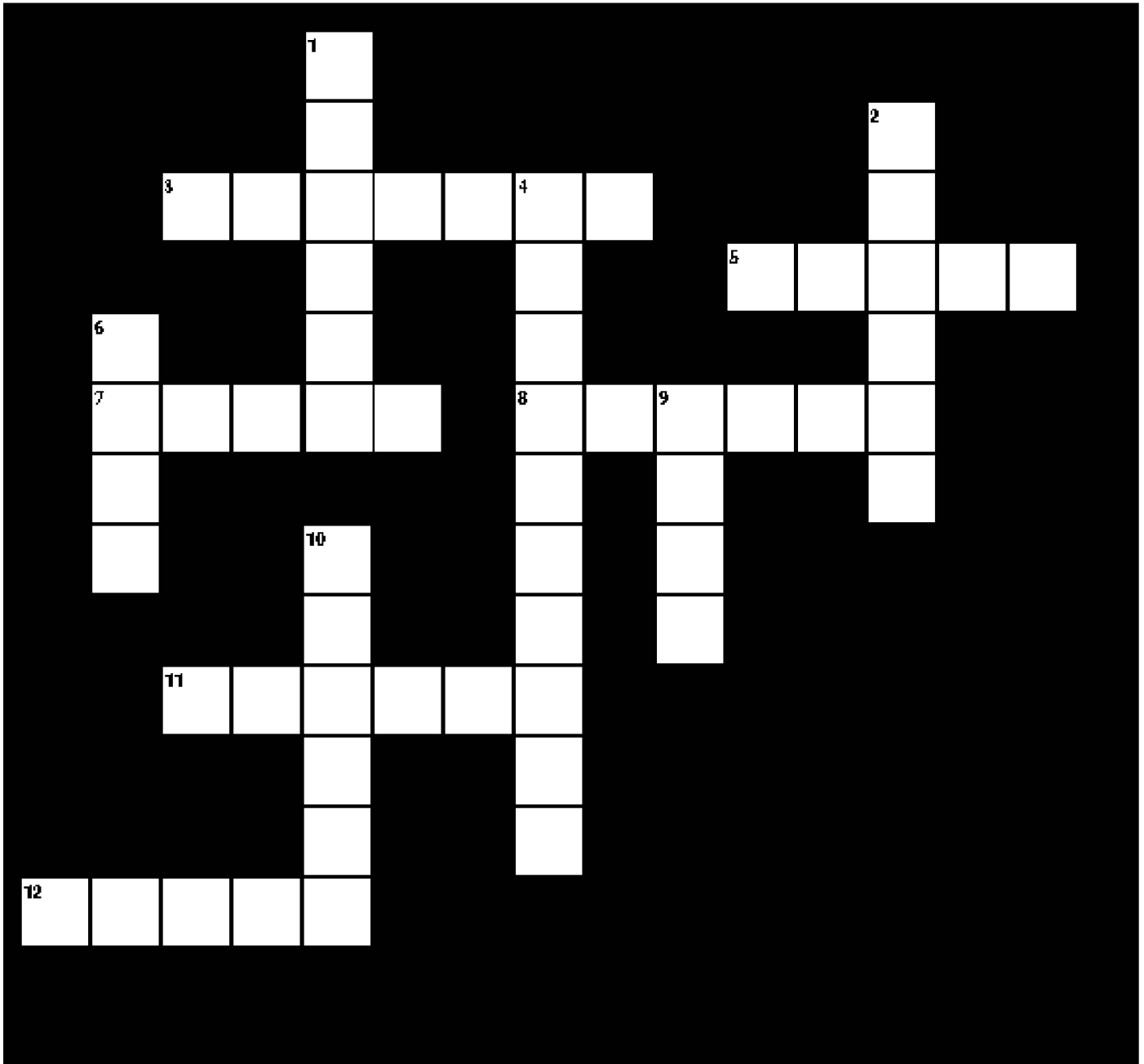
1. Discuss how the life of a teenager in Millerton in 1960 was the same as and different from your life today.
2. Make a list of actions that show that Hattie is a good daughter, granddaughter, and friend.
3. Adam and Leila decide to give Hattie a birthday party. Plan your perfect birthday party.
4. Adam's brother, Hayden, did not even know that Adam was home, showing the lack of communication in the family. Model ways that family members can keep the lines of communication open.

Vocabulary

Complete the following crossword puzzle with the words in the box from *A Corner of the Universe*.

Word Box

ordeal	gape	cringe
parlor	erratic	giddy
azure	angora	enigma
amble	wail	immaculate



Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at the left of each number.

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| ___ 1. The twelve-year-old who works at the carnival | A. Hattie Owen |
| ___ 2. Hattie's best friend | B. Adam Mercer |
| ___ 3. Raye Bennett, the boarding house cook | C. Leila Cahn |
| ___ 4. Dorothy Owen's overbearing mother; Hattie's grandmother | D. Angel Valentine |
| ___ 5. The novel's shy narrator | E. Miss Hagerty |
| ___ 6. The beautiful bank clerk who boards with the family | F. Nana |
| ___ 7. Hattie's mother | G. Betsy McGruder |
| ___ 8. The eighty+ -year-old border who acts as Hattie's surrogate grandmother | H. Dorothy Owen |
| ___ 9. Hattie's father, an artist | I. Jonathan Owen |
| ___ 10. Hattie's twenty-one-year-old mentally ill uncle | J. Cookie |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. autism
2. the carnival sideshow of freaks
3. the Summer Cotillion
4. the box that Adam gives Hattie for her birthday
5. the home movies

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if all or part of the statement is false.

- ___ 1. Hattie's uncle Adam has lived with his parents his entire life. He has never attended school.
- ___ 2. Adam is small and slight, only a bit larger than Hattie.
- ___ 3. Adam quotes from contemporary television shows, especially American Idol.
- ___ 4. Hattie and her parents run a boarding house
- ___ 5. A savant, Adam can tell what day of the week any date falls on.
- ___ 6. Nancy and Janet, Hattie's classmates, call Adam a "brain."
- ___ 7. Leila Cahn's father owns the carnival, so Leila is very stuck-up.
- ___ 8. The July 4th picnic does not go well because Adam wants ice cream rather than pie.
- ___ 9. Adam hates and fears rides but decides to ride the Ferris wheel. When the ride gets stuck, Adam panics and starts to shriek.
- ___ 10. Hattie's parents allow the Strowsky family to live at the boarding house even though there is only one small room for them; they even waive the first month's rent.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. From the beginning of the novel, which character changes the most? Do you think these changes will last? Why or why not?
2. Summarize the events in *A Corner of the Universe*.
3. Explain what the phrase "lifts the corners of the universe" means.
4. Compare and contrast Hattie and Adam. Show how they are the same and different.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Write in the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. The novel is set in the summer of (1960, 2006).
2. Hattie and her family live in the small town of (Springfield, Millerton).
3. Hattie and her parents run a (boarding house, school for handicapped kids).
4. Nancy calls Adam a (freak, jerk).
5. The (Thanksgiving feast, July 4th picnic) does not go well because Adam wants ice cream rather than pie.
6. Adam hates and fears rides but decides to ride the (Ferris wheel, miniature cars).
7. Adam is held in the hospital for (twenty-four hours, two weeks).
8. Adam arrives at the boarding house with (candy, flowers) for Angel and bursts into her room, seeing her in bed with Henry.
9. The police arrive at Nana's house because Adam is missing. They find him later: He has (shot, hanged) himself in the shed.
10. Hattie (reads family diaries, watches home movies). She realizes that life is all about changing what's handed to you.

Part II: Quote Identification (20 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the novel.

1. She sighs. "Your uncle Hayden and I have another brother," she says at last. "Adam. Your uncle Adam."
2. I am just sitting there, staring, when an absolutely horrible thought occurs to me. I don't know exactly what is wrong with Adam, but maybe it's one of those diseases that run in families.
3. "No one knows," says Adam, "what it is like."
4. I look at Adam now and see that he is terrified, terrified, terrified. How often has he felt like this?
5. It's all about changing what's handed to you, about poking around a little, lifting the corners, seeing what's underneath, poking that.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| ___ 1. The boarder who likes clocks | A. Harriet (Hattie) Owen |
| ___ 2. Hattie's best friend | B. Millerton |
| ___ 3. Hattie's mentally ill uncle | C. Ann M. Martin |
| ___ 4. The town where the novel is set | D. Mr. Penny |
| ___ 5. The girl who works at the carnival | E. Betsy McGruder |
| ___ 6. The beautiful bank clerk | F. Fred Carmel |
| ___ 7. The red-head who becomes Hattie's friend | G. Catherine Strowsky |
| ___ 8. The novel's narrator | H. Adam Mercer |
| ___ 9. The carnival owner | I. Leila Cahn |
| ___ 10. The novel's author | J. Angel Valentine |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Martin called this book *A Corner of the Universe*. Argue that the title does or does not fit the action.
2. What is it about Adam's behavior that makes him so difficult to live with?
3. Analyze how the story would be different if it took place in a small town today.
4. If you could give Nana some advice about dealing with Adam, what advice would it be and why?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| Across | Down |
| 3. erratic | 1. parlor |
| 5. giddy | 2. ordeal |
| 7. azure | 4. immaculate |
| 8. angora | 6. wail |
| 11. enigma | 9. gape |
| 12. amble | 10. cringe |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Identification (20 points)

- Autism is likely the neurological condition that afflicts Adam. Still poorly-understood, autism is called a “spectrum disorder” because those with the condition can be afflicted in different ways. On the lower end, autistic people can be totally non-functional; on the upper end, they may have some obsessive-compulsive symptoms and difficulty with social relationships but otherwise function relatively well. Adam falls in the upper middle, as he can communicate and function relatively well. However, it seems likely that he would never be independent.
- The obvious parallel is between Adam—whom Nancy calls a “freak”—and the carnival freaks. Both are the object of morbid curiosity. However, neither are freaks in any sense of the word: most of the carnival sideshow people are all fakes, a few having heart-breaking birth defects. In the same way, Adam is not a freak; rather, he is a tragic case of a sensitive and intelligent young man suffering from a neurological disorder and mental illness.
- Nana wants Hattie to attend the annual summer dance because she wants Hattie to be a popular, socially prominent young lady. Nana is overly concerned with her image and attempts to convince Hattie that style is substance, that it matters what others think and say about you.
- Adam makes Hattie a beautiful little box for her birthday. The box is wood and highly polished. This gift shows Adam’s ability to love and to create and appreciate beauty. It adds even more

poignancy to the novel because he is able to share his gifts with so few people because nearly everyone rejects him.

- The home movies freeze time and present a flat, two-dimensional view of reality. They serve as a counterpoint to Hattie’s rich analysis of events.

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. 1960 | 6. Ferris wheel |
| 2. Millerton | 7. twenty-four hours |
| 3. boarding house | 8. flowers |
| 4. freak | 9. hanged |
| 5. July 4th picnic | 10. watches home movies |

Part II: Quote Identification (20 points)

- Hattie is shocked when her mother tells her that she has another uncle. Mama tries to avoid specifics, but finally admits that her parents sent Adam away because he has what she calls “mental problems.” This is the inciting incident that sets off the plot.
- Hattie identifies very closely with Adam and fears that like him, she may be autistic. Later, Hattie comes to see that she and Adam are not that similar after all.
- For the first time, readers see Adam’s pain at being different, at being subjected to the ridicule of others. We also see with heart-wrenching emotion that he cannot help the way that he behaves and that he would give anything to be able to act as others do.
- Adam’s dramatic breakdown on the Ferris wheel is just an extreme manifestation of his everyday terror. The annoying events that most people brush off can set a mentally ill person—especially one with autism—into an abyss of terror. This incident gives readers a glimpse into Adam’s pain and makes his suicide more understandable, in light of his extreme pain.
- The last lines in the novel echo and explain the title. People must shape their reality. Sometimes

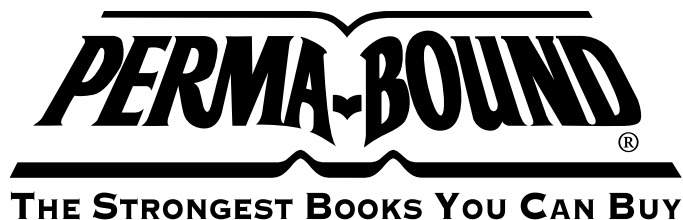
things work out and other times they don't, but the effort is what matters. This is the novel's theme.

Part III: Matching (20 points)

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

Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



Perma-Bound

617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650
Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169
E-Mail: books@perma-bound.com

Perma-Bound Canada

Box 868, Station Main • Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7A2
Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811
E-Mail: perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca

Visit us online at www.perma-bound.com