



# Criss Cross

by Lynne Rae Perkins

## Teacher's Guide

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# CLASSROOM FAVORITES

A Perma-Bound Production

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## Synopsis

### Chapter 1

Fourteen-year-old Debbie puts on her gold necklace and makes a wish that something will happen to make her life exciting.

### Chapter 2

In another part of town, Hector, age fourteen, and his sister Rowanne, age seventeen, meet Rowanne's friends at a coffeehouse at Arland Community College. Hector is impressed by the guitarist and decides that he wants to learn to play the guitar.

### Chapter 3

Debbie, Chrisanne, and Tesey are tanning in the yard. Debbie is reading a science-fiction novel.

### Chapter 4

Phil and Lenny are two other teenagers. Along with Debbie, they sit in Phil's father's truck and listen to a radio show called "Criss Cross."

### Chapter 5

Hanging out in the truck and listening to the show becomes a regular event. Hector and Debbie have an awkward moment when they do a brief ballroom dance step and their eyes lock.

### Chapter 6

Debbie and Patty hide in a bower on the way to school to change into more fashionable clothing. In a flashback, Debbie recalls shopping for the perfect jeans with her mother. Tired of shopping, Debbie finally lies to her mother, saying that a pair of jeans that are all wrong are perfect. Debbie's gold necklace has fallen off. A chipmunk picks up the necklace and drops it a short distance away.

### Chapter 7

Lenny chews tobacco. A mechanical whiz, Lenny works part-time in a garage. Lenny is also very bright; as a child, he read the encyclopedia for fun. Nonetheless, because Lenny is good with his hands, he gets shunted into the vocational-technical track. Debbie and Phil, in contrast, are in the college prep track.

### Chapter 8

Debbie and her father fix the plumbing under the sink.

### Chapter 9

Hector takes guitar lessons in the church basement. The teacher is Pastor Don, the Presbyterian youth minister. Hector's fellow students are Mary, a gray-haired woman; Mr. Schimpf ("Bob"), Hector's former Cub Scout leader; Robin, girl Hector's age; Meadow, a beautiful girl also Hector's age; and Dan Persik; a handsome football player in Hector's school. Hector, an individual, is not afraid to sing as he learns to play.

### Chapter 10

Two characters, identified only as D and P (Debbie and Patty), have a conversation in the dark. They discuss their community, Seldem, and their

teachers. They consider how their lives would be different if they lived in a different place.

### Chapter 11

Hector writes his first song. It is brief.

### Chapter 12

Lenny teaches Debbie how to drive a truck. Lenny is a good teacher and Debbie masters the intricacies of the standard transmission easily.

### Chapter 13

Hector walks through a ravine and decides to take Meadow there on their first date. He realizes that it is a drinking spot for the local teenagers, so he starts to clean it up. As he staggers out of the ravine with a leaking bag of trash, Hector sees his sister Rowanne by the



trash bin. Rowanne talks Hector into taking Meadow to the Tastee-Freeze instead of the ravine.

**Chapter 14**

Debbie and Patty are choosing quotes to accompany each senior's portrait in the yearbook. They make up haiku for various students. Debbie develops one of the haiku into a story about a sleep-over party.

**Chapter 15**

Hector learns how to play popular songs on the guitar.

**Chapter 16**

Leon is Lenny's father. Leon and Lenny move an old washing machine out of the cellar. Debbie likes Dan Persik, the football player. Dan, however, is arrogant because of his status as a football player. The narrator says that only if Dan can learn lessons in humility, compassion, respect, and independent thinking, he will continue to lead a charmed life. Hector works on his song. Russell finds Debbie's gold necklace, which he puts in his pocket.

**Chapter 17**

Debbie and Patty are enjoying sundaes from the Tastee-Freeze. They discuss Nancy Drew, the fictional detective. The guitar class arrives. It is clear that both Hector and Dan are interested in Meadow. Hector is trying to figure out how to get closer to Meadow and squeeze Dan out. The necklace flies out of Russell's pocket. Dan picks it up, intending to use it to have fun at Debbie's expense.

**Chapter 18**

While getting a room of her own, Debbie comes across her mother's collection of small figurines of dogs. She also finds her mother's scrapbooks, yearbooks, and other odds and ends. Speaking to her neighbor Fran, Debbie's mother inflates Debbie's role in taking care of an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Bruning. This elderly lady has long hair and before she was widowed, she and her husband operated the Idle Hour Restaurant. In a flashback, readers learn that Debbie started helping Mrs. Bruning by taking her laundry off the line. They like each other and soon, Debbie was helping Mrs. Bruning out a lot. On the last day of school, Dan teases Debbie by saying that he has something that she might like. He is referring to the gold necklace, but he doesn't name it.

**Chapter 19**

The necklace falls out of Dan's pocket and gets stuck in the road.

**Chapter 20**

At her request, Debbie cuts off Mrs. Bruning's long hair. The elderly lady is delighted to be free of its weight.

**Chapter 21**

The kids discuss confession. When Lenny's father's truck won't start, Debbie sits in the driver's seat while the boys give the truck a push start. She turns over the engine and gets the car running. They drive around to re-charge the battery until they run out of gas. They head off on foot to the nearest gas station, again discussing confession.

**Chapter 22**

This chapter is written in columns. The left column tracks Debbie reading *Wuthering Heights*. The right column tracks Lenny reading *Popular Mechanics*.

**Chapter 23**

Debbie constructs a five minute romance in her head about Phil.

**Chapter 24**

Mrs. Bruning's grandson Peter and his parents visit. They know Mrs. Bruning can't cope in the house and want her to move to an apartment. "Grosi," as they call her, is adamant about staying in her home. Peter and Debbie meet while she is fixing Mrs. Bruning's sink. When Mrs. Bruning's diabetes spins out of control, Debbie competently gives her a sweet drink and then drives her to the hospital, after she and Peter push-start her car, because her battery is also dead.

**Chapter 25**

Meanwhile, the annual Seldem Day celebration is going on. Hector sees Dan at the festivities, accompanied by Meadow.

**Chapter 26**

As Debbie and Peter repair Mrs. Bruning's house, Peter tells Debbie all about his life in California. To have an adventure, they decide to take the bus to the next place it stops – New Bridge— and get off. All the ordinary things seem special because the setting has changed and the kids have a perfect day. The two hold hands and discuss their theories of life. Soon after, Peter returns home to California.

**Chapter 27**

Hector writes a song.

**Chapter 28**

Mrs. Bruning comes home from the hospital. She spies Debbie mooning over a photograph of Peter, and gives her his latest school picture.

**Chapter 29**

Peter writes Debbie a letter and sends a photo. Debbie's mother had once loved a boy who went away, the young man who gave her all the dog figurines, but they don't discuss it; this is an example of a missed connection.

**Chapter 30**

When Debbie shows Patty the photo of Peter, Patty says that maybe she could work for Mrs. Bruning, too.

**Chapter 31**

Debbie thinks about Peter's letter and how it makes her feel special.

**Chapter 32**

Dan asks a handicapped man how he came to lose his legs. The man explains that his injury occurred during a war. Dan's concern shows that he can be a decent human being; he is teetering between decent and not.

**Chapter 33**

Lenny and his father decide to roast a pig for the block party-luau.

**Chapter 34**

They set up the pig roaster.

**Chapter 35**

Rowanne dresses Hector in a sarong so he can entertain at the block party-luau.

**Chapter 36**

Hector finds Debbie's gold necklace.

**Chapter 37**

At the block party, the kids talk about different things, including the piano teacher Miss Spransy who married a truck driver at middle age. He dropped dead of a heart attack after only six months, but Miss Spransy was happy because she had been loved. Rowanne tells about Becky, a girl who she works with, who always lies about having boyfriends. Becky feels that it is so important to have a boyfriend that she makes them up.

**Chapter 38**

Lenny asks Debbie on a date to the movies, but she prefers to remain friends. Hector gives Debbie her necklace. For a moment it looks like they will feel that spark of attraction, but the moment passes without a connection. The lightning bugs blink.

**Timeline**

- 1948 State of Israel founded
- 1950 Korean War begins
- 1952 Car seat belts introduced
- 1954 Supreme Court issues *Brown v. Board of Education*, making segregation illegal
- 1955 Disneyland opens  
McDonald's corporation founded
- 1956 Sabin invents oral polio vaccine
- 1957 Lynne Rae Perkins born  
Dr. Seuss publishes *The Cat in the Hat*
- 1958 NASA established
- 1960 First televised U.S. presidential debate
- 1961 Peace Corps founded  
Berlin Wall built  
Alan Shepard is first American in space
- 1963 President Kennedy assassinated
- 1967 Six Day War in Middle East
- 1969 Neil Armstrong is the first human on the moon
- 1974 President Nixon resigns
- 1978 Lynne Rae Perkins earns her B.A. from Pennsylvania State University
- 1979 Sony introduces the Walkman
- 1981 Perkins earns her M.A. from Wisconsin University  
First woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court  
Pac-man video game is very popular
- 1983 Sally Ride becomes first woman in space
- 1989 Berlin Wall taken down
- 1990 Nelson Mandella is freed in South Africa
- 1991 Collapse of Soviet Union
- 1997 Scientists clone sheep  
China resumes control of Hong Kong
- 1999 World population reaches 6 billion
- 2001 Sept. 11: al-Qaeda terrorists destroy World Trade Center in New York City
- 2002 Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter wins Nobel Peace Prize
- 2005 *Criss Cross* published
- 2006 *Criss Cross* wins the Newbery Medal

## Author Sketch

Perkins grew up in Cheswick, PA, near Pittsburgh. She lived on a little street where all the houses were built at the same time, and everybody moved in within a year or two. "It was a great place to grow up because there were a ton of kids and we were always out in the street or out in the yard and our parents were sitting on the porch at night," she noted in an interview. She added: "I remember summer nights on the back porch, just listening to the adults talk. And maybe we would be playing cards or maybe we would just be sitting around. My mother is quite a talker, and our next-door neighbor was quite a talker. So I spent a lot of nights listening, which meant as a child, I didn't talk a lot myself because I never really needed to."

Perkins majored in printmaking at Pennsylvania State University, where she earned her B.A. in 1978. Then she attended graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, earning her M.A. three years later. After graduate school, she worked as a graphic designer in Boston, where she met her future husband Bill, a furniture maker. The couple moved to a remote area in Leelanau County, MI, in 1987. There, they lived in a little cabin. Perkins said: "My husband had bought land to grow Christmas trees on, and he had built this tiny cabin that he was going to camp out in while he worked on the trees. Our first year there, we had nothing. We had no electricity or running water or telephone. Then we started getting those things, one by one. It was our goal to live as inexpensively as possible, which we did."

Perkins broke into publishing when she met Greenwillow's former art director Ava Weiss in 1993. In the cabin, Perkins had spent a lot of time drawing and painting. After she had her first child, she did some funny drawings about being a mother. At the same time, someone that she had grown up with back in Pittsburgh was designing software for a coloring book and needed drawings. Perkins sent her copies of the drawings she had been working on, along with a letter. Impressed with the high quality of Perkins' work, the friend signed Perkins up for the SCBWI, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators conference in Pittsburgh. The conference included a portfolio review with Ava Weiss. Perkins spent about three months preparing for the portfolio review with Ava Weiss. Weiss was extremely encouraging. She asked Perkins if she also wrote, saying, "Send us your ideas." Weiss gave Perkins her business card. This meeting inspired Perkins



to write *Home Lovely*, which Greenwillow published. Perkins' young adult books are unusual because they combine pictures with the text, as is evident in *Criss Cross*. This combination of text and pictures, noted Deborah Stevenson in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, creates an "offhand verisimilitude of moments in text and image that catch readers, hooking them on for the ride to wherever Perkins wants to take them."

Perkins' first book, *Home Lovely*, published in 1995, concerns Janelle and her young daughter, Tiffany, who combats her loneliness by planting a garden near their trailer home. Perkins' next young adult novel, *Clouds for Dinner*, told the story of Janet and her unusual parents. Martha Parravano, writing in *Horn Book*, said that Perkins "once again celebrates the non-traditional." *All Alone in the Universe*, published in 1999, traces the lives of two best friends as they grow apart during a school year full of changes.

Perkins and her husband now live in northwest Michigan with their two children, Frank, 14, and Lucy, 12.

## Critic's Corner

Even before she won the Newbery Medal in 2006 for *Criss Cross*, Perkins' books were celebrated by critics as well as readers. For instance, in 1999, *All Alone in the Universe* was named to the 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing, list by the New York Public Library; and was one of *Booklist's* Best Books. The novel also won a Blue Ribbon for Fiction from the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*.

Reviews for *Criss Cross* were highly laudatory. Allison Gray, reviewing the novel for *School Library Journal*, gave it a starred review and said: "There is a great deal of humor in this gentle story about a group of childhood friends facing the crossroads of life and how they wish to live it. Young teens will certainly relate to the self-consciousnesses and uncertainty of all of the characters, each of whom is straining toward clarity and awareness." Gillian Engberg, writing in *Booklist*, also gave the novel a starred review. Engberg said: "Perkins writes with subtle, wry humor about perceptive moments that will speak directly to readers: universe-expanding crushes, which fill the world with 'signs and wonder'; scornful reappraisals of childhood things (Debbie's disdain for Nancy Drew is particularly funny); urgent concerns about outfits, snappy retorts, and self-image. . . . Best of all are the understated moments, often private and piercing in their authenticity, that capture intelligent, likable teens searching for signs of who they are, and who they'll become."

## Other Works by the Author

*Home Lovely* (1995)  
*Clouds for Dinner* (1997)  
*All Alone in the Universe* (1999)  
*The Broken Cat* (2002)  
 (Illustrator) Sharon Phillips Denslow, *Georgie Lee* (2002)  
*Snow Music* (2003)

## Bibliography

Newbery Medal. (Lynne Rae Perkins wins 2006 Newbery Medal) *The Horn Book Magazine* March-April 2006 v82 i2 p235.

"Private I: the protagonists in Lynne Rae Perkins's Newbery-winning novel are shy, talented, and extremely thoughtful—kind of like the author." Barb Barstow. *School Library Journal* March 2006 v52 i3 p66.

"The Best in Kids' Books." (Lynne Rae Perkins, Chris Raschka awarded with Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal) *Time for Kids*. Feb 3, 2006 v11 i17 p2.

"Greenwillow, Hyperion win Newbery, Caldecott." (Lynne Rae Perkins won the 2006 John Newbery Medal for her novel *Criss Cross*) Diane Roback. *Publishers Weekly*. Jan 30, 2006 v253 i5 p10.

"Books for Youth." (2005 EDITORS' CHOICE) *Booklist* Jan 1, 2006 v102 i9-10 p12.

*Criss Cross*. *The Horn Book Magazine*. Jan-Feb 2006 v82 i1 p11.

*Criss Cross*. *Publishers Weekly*. Oct 31, 2005 v252 i43 p58.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. *Criss Cross*. Gillian Engberg. *Booklist*. Oct 15, 2005 v102 i4 p47.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. *Criss Cross*. *School Library Journal*. Oct 2005 v51 i10 p565.

Lynne Rae Perkins: *Criss Cross*. Christine M. Hepperman. *The Horn Book Magazine* Sept-Oct 2005 v81 i5 p585.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. *Criss Cross*. Allison Gray. *School Library Journal*. Sept 2005 v51 i9 p210.

## General Objectives

1. To identify the novel's unusual form
2. To see how the artwork complements the narrative
3. To assess each character's personality
4. To trace the sequence of events
5. To appreciate the author's creativity
6. To find examples of lives intersecting
7. To find examples of maturity
8. To appreciate and understand the humor
9. To identify the novel's theme
10. To describe the novel's ending

## Specific Objectives

1. To identify the different literary forms that comprise this novel, including poetry, prose, and question-and-answer formats
2. To evaluate the interplay of experimental passages and traditional narrative
3. To scrutinize the pictures, photographs, sketches, and other visuals to decide what they add to the novel
4. To analyze why Debbie wants something to happen to change their lives
5. To discuss how Hector feels that he is not yet a fully-developed person
6. To see how the lives of Debbie and Peter intersect but don't connect
7. To identify with the teenagers' feelings of being self-conscious and uncertain
8. To understand how a group of childhood friends search for who they are and what they will become
9. To identify the novel's understated moments
10. To understand what the lightning bugs symbolize

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Lynne Rae Perkins' style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**Structure:** the form of the novel. *Criss Cross* has an experimental form, including traditional narrative passages, description, poems, prose, haiku, and question-and-answer formats. For instance, one section of dialogue, written entirely in haiku, reads, "Jeff White is handsome, / but his hair is so greasy. / If he would wash it—."

**Allusion:** a reference to a well-known book, person, place, thing, or event. Allusions enrich a literary work by adding layers of meaning. In Chapter 6, for example, Perkins makes an allusion to Penelope unraveling her weaving. The reference is to *The Odyssey*. In the epic, Penelope, Odysseus' wife, weaves her tapestry during the day and unravels it at night. She uses this ruse for ten years to put off having to choose a new husband as she waits for Odysseus to return from the Trojan War. By alluding to *The Odyssey*, Perkins gives her novel an epic flavor, elevating the path to adulthood into an epic journey.

**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. *Criss Cross* contains several flashbacks. For instance, in Chapter 6, Debbie recalls shopping with her mother for jeans.

## The Importance of Setting

The setting is intentionally vague and imprecise in *Criss Cross*. Nonetheless, a few cultural references set the book in the 1970s. For example, since Lenny is good with his hands, he gets shunted into the vocational-technical track. He is very bright, but because he is shy and flustered by taking tests, he is closed out of the college preparatory classes. Debbie and Phil, in contrast, are placed in the college prep track. This type of rigid sorting is rarely commonplace in American schools today, but was routine in the 1970s. Now, in contrast, students are usually free to take the most challenging academic classes even if they don't meet the precise standards for admission.

Another 1970s reference is bell-bottomed jeans that drag on the ground. These were a hallmark fashion of the 1970s, in contrast to the boot-legged jeans that are fashionable today.

Perkins also includes references to popular music that indicates the time in which the action takes place. She refers to a song by the Mamas and the Papas, for instance.

Despite these cultural references that set *Criss Cross* over thirty years in the past, the novel isn't dated. Quite the opposite is true. Most readers will find themselves and their contemporaries reflected in the novel's characters and situations.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Fiction

Avi, *The Secret School*  
Joan Bauer, *Hope Was Here*  
Meg Cabot, *The Princess Diaries*  
Jenny Carroll, *Shadowland*  
Andrew Clemens, *The School Story*  
Sarah Dessen, *Dreamland*  
Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*  
Kate DiCamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*  
Patricia Reilly Giff, *Pictures of Hollis Woods*

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*  
Carl Hiaasen, *Hoot*  
Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*  
Davida Wills Hurwin, *A Time for Dancing*  
E. L. Konigsburg, *Silent to the Bone*  
Gail Carson Levine, *Ella Enchanted*  
Lois Lowry, *Gathering Blue*  
Ben Mikaleson, *Touching Spirit Bear*  
Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife*  
Louise Rennison, *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*  
Jerry Spinelli, *Loser*  
Pat Mora, Beatriz Vidal, *A Library for Juana*  
Jacqueline Woodson, *If You Come Softly*

### DVDs and Videos

*The Breakfast Club*  
*Pretty in Pink*  
*Sixteen Candles*  
*St. Elmo's Fire*  
*Ten Things I Hate About You*

### Audio Cassettes

*Criss Cross*

### Internet

Lynne Rae Perkins Official Web Site  
[www.lynnraeperkins.com/](http://www.lynnraeperkins.com/)

Lynne Rae Perkins: HarperCollins Biography  
[www.harperchildrens.com/teacher/catalog/author\\_xml.asp?authorID=18005](http://www.harperchildrens.com/teacher/catalog/author_xml.asp?authorID=18005) -

Rising Star: Lynne Rae Perkins  
<http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/puboff/bccb/>

Lynne Rae Perkins Wins Newbery Medal for "*Criss Cross*"  
[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/23/AR2006012301760.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/23/AR2006012301760.html)

NPR: '*Criss Cross*' Nets Newbery Medal for Perkins  
[www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5170249](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5170249)

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Lynne Rae Perkins' *Criss Cross* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- family
- friendship
- helping others
- humor
- intersecting lives
- love
- maturity
- music
- parallel lives
- vignettes

### Motifs

- being cool and competent in times of crisis
- having special talents
- being mechanically inclined
- enjoying music
- having a crush on someone
- reappraising childhood touchstones
- being concerned about your clothing and self-image
- trying to connect with other people on a meaningful level
- enjoying popular culture
- following the trail of a lost necklace

## 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. the spectrum of connectedness (preface)  
*(The visual that opens the book announces its theme: a search for connection with others. The main characters, all young teenagers, are trying to figure out their identities. They are looking for the meaning of life, for love, for a link to others. As the visual shows, people move back and forth as they connect and disconnect with others. We make friends, we lose friends. We think we know someone, and then we discover that we don't. People enter our life, and then they leave it.)*
2. The show was called "Criss Cross." (Chap. 4, p. 35)  
*(The kids sit in Phil's father's truck and listen to a humorous radio show called "Criss Cross." The radio show helps readers*

*understand the book's format and tone. The radio show has some songs that "could be considered sick but could also be considered funny," jokes, and sound effects. The radio show's montage format matches the book's vignette format and both share the same offbeat sense of humor.)*

3. She was fibbing, but it was a noble fib, because she was really saying, "I love you. I want us to be having fun." (Chap. 6, p. 48)  
*(Debbie and her mother are shopping for the "perfect" pair of bell-bottomed jeans. After hours of shopping, Debbie is tired of shopping and wants to please her mother. As a result, she lies about having found the pants she thinks will make her fashionable. Debbie hopes that her mother will see through the lie and not make her wear the pants, but she doesn't. This scene shows not only the gulf between the generations but also that Debbie is a sweet child who wants to please her mother.)*
4. I want to be different from people in Seldem and Birdvale, too. I wonder how you get that way. (Chap. 10, p. 89)  
*(Debbie and Patty wonder if moving to somewhere else will change their lives. They wonder how they would be different if they lived somewhere else, too. This is part of searching for their identity.)*
5. "What are you doing?" he asked. "Looking for an outlet," she said. Lenny said, "Have you tried tennis?" (Chap. 14, p. 127)  
*(Patty recalls a day in science class when the teacher had asked her find a place to plug in the overhead projector. She had crawled under a table to find an outlet, and had this exchange with Lenny when she emerged from under the table. Criss Cross is a very funny story with many flashes of wit like this example.)*
6. He was also thinking about his voice. Finding his own voice. (Chap. 16, p. 146)  
*(The night at the coffeehouse, Liz had talked about the importance of finding your own voice. Hector isn't sure what it means. Readers know that your "voice" is your unique way of expressing yourself, your personality. That is precisely what Perkins has done in this novel.)*
7. Still, the girl in the picture looked like she knew how to make things be golden for her. (Chap. 18, p. 166-167)  
*(Debbie finds a picture of her mother Helen at age seventeen. The picture is shown on page 167. Helen had indeed been a beautiful young woman who appeared to have the entire world spread out before her. Debbie wonders how to make things golden for herself, to make her life special and meaningful.)*

8. "This is not who I am," said Debbie. "I don't do things like this." "Yes, you do," Peter said. "You do them all the time." (Chap. 24, p. 237)  
*(Debbie and Peter are trying to start Mrs. Bruning's car. Joking, Peter says that Debbie has to know how to start a car if she's going to steal people's cars and save their lives. Debbie demurs, but Peter knows her better than she knows herself. This scene shows Debbie's quest for identity and how others view her.)*
9. "I think," he said, "that it's a good thing to get out of your usual, you know, surroundings." (Chap. 26, p. 267)  
*(Peter believes that you find out things about yourself that you don't know when you are in different surroundings. Then, when you return to your ordinary routine, you find that you have changed in a small but significant way. Peter and Debbie try this by spending a day in the next town. This scene shows one way the characters are trying to find their identity and discover who they are and where they fit in the universe.)*
10. Maybe only half a second. Their paths crossed, but they missed each other. (Chap. 38, p. 335)  
*(At the end of the novel, Hector and Debbie see each other for a moment, but the moments are not aligned. In effect, they "criss cross," and the connection is not made. Thus, the novel ends on the same note on which it began.)*

## 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. At the beginning of the novel, what does Debbie wish for?  
*(She wishes that something would happen.)*
2. What do Debbie and her mother buy at the store?  
*(They buy some bell-bottomed jeans for Debbie.)*
3. Why does Hector go to the ravine? What happens to him there?  
*(He considers taking Meadow to the ravine on their first date and so decides to pick up some of the trash. Two blocks from the gas station, the bag breaks and Hector has to run to the trash can.)*

4. What happens to Debbie's necklace?  
*(She loses it and it gets carried all around town, first picked up by a chipmunk, then ending up in the pockets of different people, and finally on the pavement where Hector lost his shoe. Hector returns the necklace to Debbie.)*
5. What story does Rowanne tell about her co-worker Becky?  
*(Becky always talked about her boyfriend Rick. Finally she said they were getting married and the women at the office gave her a party. Becky said that Rick didn't want her to work and so she gave her two-week's notice, but she returned to work a few days later. Rowanne learns to her astonishment that Becky made up the entire story and does it all the time.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What do the china dog figurines represent?  
*(Debbie's mother Helen had received the china figurines from a young man whom she had loved but the relationship did not work out. The figurines, therefore, represent another criss cross, another missed connection in life.)*
7. In what ways is Debbie an admirable character?  
*(Students can argue that she is courageous, independent, and intelligent. She thinks for herself and shows compassion for others as well, as shown in her dealing with Mrs. Bruning.)*
8. What is the theme or main idea of this book?  
*(The theme is the difficulty of making connections in life. It is also about the search for meaning and identity.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Why do you think the author includes visuals such as illustrations, photographs, and charts?  
*(These visuals add another dimension to the story. They help readers visualize the characters, plot, and author's meaning.)*
10. What does the title mean?  
*(The characters "criss cross" but don't intersect. Each is hoping to make a meaningful connection with someone else, a connection that will help them discover who they are and where they are going in life.)*

### Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Make a poster for a movie version of the novel. Include the names of real actors to play Debbie, Hector, Lenny, and so on.
12. Write an alternate ending in which Hector and Debbie do connect at the end of the novel.



## Across the Curriculum

### Art/Music

1. Place your family and friends on the “spectrum of connectedness.” Show how close you feel to each one.
2. Hector is very impressed with the guitar player and decides to learn to play the guitar. Learn the basics of playing a musical instrument of your choice.
3. Find a song for the guitarist to play. The song can be well-known or unfamiliar.
4. Draw a new cover for this book. Be sure the cover shows what the book is all about.
5. Write a song of your own, as Hector does.
6. Debbie and her mother shop for the perfect pair of jeans. Design your perfect pair of jeans. Then add a shirt, jacket, shoes, and accessories.
7. Hector listens to a song by the Mamas and the Papas. Choose any three of their songs, listen to them, and share one of them with a group of your classmates.
8. Sing “Edelweiss” from *The Sound of Music*, as the guitar group does.

### Language Arts

1. Debbie makes wishes. Make three wishes. Then describe in an essay how you can make them come true.
2. In Chapter 1, Debbie thinks of the myth of King Midas. Read the myth of King Midas and then write a myth of your own.
3. Choose a chapter from the novel and retell it from another character’s point of view.
4. What happens to the characters ten years in the future? Explain their fate in a brief essay.
5. Rowenna tells her brother that Skip looks at her with “cow eyes.” Explain this idiom. Then find three other idioms related to animals and explain them.

6. Read Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” and apply it to *Criss Cross*. How are the themes the same?
7. Hector finds the metaphor in the song by the Mamas and the Papas. Remember that a metaphor is a literary comparison in which the more familiar object illuminates the less familiar one. Find three literary metaphors. Write them on a poster.
8. In Chapter 14, the characters write haiku, a type of Japanese poetry. Each haiku has 17 syllables, arranged as follows: line 1: 5 syllables; line 2: 7 syllables; line 3: 5 syllables. Choose four characters from the novel. Write one haiku to describe each character.
9. Debbie rejects the *Nancy Drew* books, which she used to enjoy. Read one of these books and write a critical review in which you agree or disagree with Debbie’s assessment.

### Social Studies/Geography

1. Lynne Rae Perkins lives with her family in northern Michigan. Report on Michigan, including its history, primary industries, culture, and location.
2. The author compares Debbie and Patty to “Two Eves in the Garden of Eden.” Explain the allusion (the literary reference).
3. Lenny’s mother doesn’t want him to sit in a certain position because she believes that he will get arthritis. This is an old wives’ tale, a belief that is not true. Find three other old wives’ tales, such as the belief that walking under a ladder is bad luck, and explain why they are false.
4. Lenny is shunted into the vocational-technical track. Debbie and Phil, in contrast, are in the college prep track. Research education in another country to see how students are assigned to classes and, in effect, careers.
5. Hector was a Cub Scout. Prepare a display about the Boy Scouts. Include information on their history, membership levels, and awards.
6. Debbie and Patty discuss how their life would be different if they lived in a different place. Choose a place that is radically different from your own

locale. Write a journal entry about what your life would be liked if you lived there.

7. Debbie has heard about the Depression, polio, and scarlet fever but doesn't know much about them. Choose one of these topics and report on it. Explain its significance.
8. Hold a luau, including authentic Hawaiian food and entertainment.

**Speech/Drama**

1. Phil, Debbie, and Lenny enjoy listening to a radio show called "Criss Cross." Working with some friends, write and perform an episode in this radio show that the kids would enjoy. Perform your show for the class.
2. The radio show "Criss Cross" features silly jokes that follow this format: "What do you get when you cross a (something) with a (something else)?" Write three jokes and see if they make your classmates laugh.
3. Work with a friend. Act out your favorite scene from the book.
4. Debbie and her father fix the plumbing under the sink. Explain how to perform a home repair. If possible, make the repair as well.
5. When Debbie cuts off her hair, Mrs. Bruning says, "Free at last, free at last," quoting the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speech. Explain to a small group of classmates why the speech is important. Then deliver a portion of this speech to the group.
6. Write and perform a play about maturing.
7. In a roundtable discussion, explore what makes *Criss Cross* so special. Why did it receive the top award in young adult literature, the Newbery Medal?

**Science**

1. Hector thinks about gravity in Chapter 2. Report on gravity. What is it? How would our lives be different without gravity?
2. Hector remarks that some girls he sees are changing from caterpillars into butterflies. How do caterpillars change into butterflies? On a chart, show the four steps in this process.

3. In Chapter 3, Debbie, Chrisanne, and Tesey are tanning. Find out how tanning changes your skin.
4. While listening to the radio show, Debbie forms her body in the shape of the Big Dipper. Choose any five constellations. Draw them, listing the major stars they contain.
5. Explain what arthritis is, including its causes, symptoms, and treatments.
6. Patty thinks about what might happen if the atoms in objects would suddenly rearrange themselves. Make a model of an atom. Label the parts.
7. Mrs. Bruning has diabetes. Report on this disease, paying special attention to the differences between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.
8. Explain how fireflies glow.

**Math**

1. Do the puzzle that Debbie does in Chapter 16. Use your name and the name of someone you like.
2. Lenny's father's truck runs out of gas. On a chart, track the price of gas in the past five years. Use three-to-six month increments.
3. Debbie would like to visit Peter in California, but it is too far away. Choose a city in California and calculate how far it is from your home. Calculate how much it would cost to drive, travel by bus, or fly from your home to the city you chose.

**Alternate Assessment**

1. Lenny read the encyclopedia for fun. Read six entries in an encyclopedia and summarize them.
2. Choose a quote to accompany your portrait in the yearbook. Paste a photograph of yourself on a sheet of paper and write the quote under it.
3. As Debbie and Patty change into more fashionable clothing on the way to school, Patty says, "If you think about it, it shouldn't even matter what we wear. People will like us for who we are." Debate this issue with some classmates.
4. Dan enjoys the "perfection" of his apple dumpling. Prepare your favorite dessert to share with the class. Provide the recipe.

## Vocabulary

Complete each sentence with a word from the box. You will have words left over.

intrigue	auburn	coalesce	enigmatic	rapt
flimsy	peninsula	waver	fragrant	pungent
serene	treacherous	tentative	sodden	balmy
idyllic	ornery	fibbing	coupe	strolling

1. The sharp, \_\_\_\_\_ smell of the frying onions lingers in the air for days.
2. Because it is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ and warm night, no one needs to put on a sweater.
3. Everything is uncertain about the party, so the friends could only make \_\_\_\_\_ plans.
4. Jillian has \_\_\_\_\_ hair, a lovely reddish color.
5. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a land mass surrounded by water on three sides.
6. The boat tosses and turns in the dangerous, \_\_\_\_\_ ocean.
7. The garden is \_\_\_\_\_ after a week of steady rain.
8. The cranky, \_\_\_\_\_ child whined for over an hour.
9. The light and \_\_\_\_\_ piece of paper shreds easily.
10. Roses are very \_\_\_\_\_ flowers that have a sweet smell, like perfume.
11. Detectives are good at solving \_\_\_\_\_ and other conspiracy plots.
12. The family went \_\_\_\_\_ after the big meal, taking a slow walk around the park.
13. The children are \_\_\_\_\_ by the juggler, totally immersed in her show.
14. The vacation is \_\_\_\_\_, peaceful and calm.
15. Mona Lisa has a mysterious, \_\_\_\_\_ smile.

## 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 left.

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| ___ 1. Mrs. Bruning's grandson; he lives in California                          | A. Debbie Pelbry |
| ___ 2. the guitar teacher   | B. Hector        |
| ___ 3. the teenager Hector has a crush on                                       | C. Rowanne       |
| ___ 4. Debbie's dog   | D. Lenny         |
| ___ 5. the character who loses her gold necklace                                | E. Peter         |
| ___ 6. the young man who can fix anything                                       | F. Cupcake       |
| ___ 7. the handsome football player   | G. Pastor Don    |
| ___ 8. the character who takes guitar lessons and entertains at the block party | H. Mrs. Bruning  |
| ___ 9. Hector's sister  | I. Dan Persik    |
| ___ 10. the elderly lady whom Debbie helps with household chores                | J. Meadow        |

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

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

1. Debbie's gold necklace
2. *Criss Cross*
3. little figurines of china dogs
4. lightning bugs
5. guitar

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- \_\_\_ 1. Debbie is fourteen years old when the novel opens.
- \_\_\_ 2. Phil and Lenny read a magazine called *Criss-Cross*.
- \_\_\_ 3. Debbie and Patty hide in some trees and plants on the way to school to change into more fashionable clothing.
- \_\_\_ 4. Debbie, Patty, and Phil are in the vocational track in school. Lenny, in contrast, is in the college preparation classes.
- \_\_\_ 5. Debbie and her father fix the plumbing under the sink.
- \_\_\_ 6. Hector likes to play music, but he has no interest at all in writing songs.
- \_\_\_ 7. Debbie and Patty discuss Nancy Drew, the fictional detective.
- \_\_\_ 8. Mrs. Bruning cuts Debbie's long hair off at her request.
- \_\_\_ 9. Dan asks a handicapped man how he came to lose his legs. The man explains that his injury occurred during a war.
- \_\_\_ 10. Lenny asks Debbie on a date to the movies, but she prefers to remain friends.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What does the author mean when she says, "People move back and forth in this area like molecules in steam"? Use examples from the novel to make your point.
2. Summarize the events in *Criss Cross*.
3. One critic argues that *Criss Cross* is a character study about people making decisions that send them along one path instead of another. Choose one character and show how this is true.
4. Explain what makes Hector such an appealing character.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Circle the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. Debbie, Phil, Lenny, and the rest of the gang often listen to a radio show called (**Criss Cross, Cupcake**).
2. In a flashback, Debbie recalls shopping for the perfect (**shoes, jeans**) with her mother.
3. Lenny is very intelligent; as a child, he read the (**newspaper, encyclopedia**) for fun.
4. The novel takes place in the community of (**Seldem, East Meadow**).
5. Lenny teaches Debbie how to (**repair a sink, drive a truck**).
6. Leon and Lenny move an old (**sofa, washing machine**) out of the cellar.
7. While getting a room of her own, Debbie comes across her mother's collection of small figurines of (**flowers, dogs**).
8. As Debbie and Peter repair Mrs. Bruning's house, Peter tells Debbie all about his life in (**Missouri, California**).
9. Lenny and his father decide to roast a (**turkey, pig**) for the block party-luau.
10. Hector gives Debbie her gold (**ring, necklace**).

### Part II: Quote Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each quote and explain its importance in the story.

1. "Crisscross," said the old movie voice, and then there was the sound of a train wreck.
2. Have you ever been somewhere, and it hit you that if you lived there instead of where you do, your whole life might be really different?
3. "I think," he said, "that it's a good thing to get out of your usual, you know, surroundings."
4. They might have talked then about how they felt, and what you did next. But their secrets inadvertently side-stepped each other, unaware, like blindfolded elephants crossing the tiny room.
5. Someone opened the jar. The lightning bugs knew what to do. They flew into the night air, every last one. Blinking, "Here I am."

## 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.  | Russell Kebbesward | A. the guitar teacher   |
| ___ 2.  | Meadow             | B. Grosi  |
| ___ 3.  | Fran               | C. Hector's sister  |
| ___ 4.  | Mrs. Bruning       | D. the serious, pudgy young man in the guitar class           |
| ___ 5.  | Peter              | E. the handsome football player                               |
| ___ 6.  | Debbie Pelbry      | F. the pretty girl whose name Hector initially misunderstands |
| ___ 7.  | Hector             | G. the boy who cleans the ravine                              |
| ___ 8.  | Pastor Don         | H. the Pelbrys' neighbor                                      |
| ___ 9.  | Dan Persik         | I. Mrs. Bruning's grandson                                    |
| ___ 10. | Rowanne            | J. the girl who helps Mrs. Bruning out                        |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Debbie and her friends are trying to leave childhood and become adults.
2. *Criss Cross* is a very amusing novel. Cite two examples of humor in the story and explain why they are amusing.
3. Analyze the novel's unusual form. Cite at least two examples to make your point.
4. Describe the relationship between Hector, Meadow, and Dan Persik.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |              |                |               |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. pungent   | 6. treacherous | 11. intrigue  |
| 2. balmy     | 7. sodden      | 12. strolling |
| 3. tentative | 8. ornery      | 13. rapt      |
| 4. auburn    | 9. flimsy      | 14. idyllic   |
| 5. peninsula | 10. fragrant   | 15. enigmatic |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

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

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

#### Part II: Identification (20 points)

- Debbie's gold necklace gets lost and its path is random, like the characters' search for connectedness and identity. Thus, it becomes a symbol for the characters' quest.
- Criss Cross* is the book's title. It is also the name of a radio show that contains humorous songs, silly jokes, and a clip from an old movie, all of which reflect the author's wit. The kids enjoy listening to the show and it helps bind them together.
- Debbie's mother Helen has a collection of little figurines of china dogs, given to her by a former boyfriend. Their relationship did not work out. The figurines, therefore, represent another criss cross, another missed connection in life.
- At the very end of the novel, someone opens the jar and releases the lightning bugs. They fly out into the night air, blinking "Here I am." The lightning bugs symbolize the novel's teenage characters, who assert their individuality and selfhood as they fly off to become adults.
- Hector learns to play the guitar after he hears a guitar player at a coffee house. He composes his own songs, too. The guitar and the music produced from it show one way that people express their identity.

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

#### Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>Criss Cross</i> | 6. washing machine |
| 2. jeans              | 7. dogs            |
| 3. encyclopedia       | 8. California      |
| 4. Seldom             | 9. pig             |
| 5. drive a truck      | 10. necklace       |

#### Part II: Quote Identification (20 points)

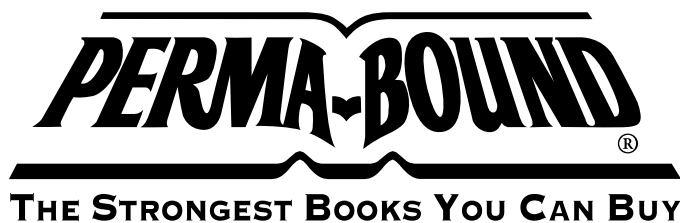
- The kids sit in Phil's father's truck and listen to a humorous radio show called "*Criss Cross*." The radio show helps readers understand the book's format and tone. The radio show has some songs that "could be considered sick but could also be considered funny," jokes, and sound effects. The radio show's montage format matches the book's vignette format and both share the same offbeat sense of humor.
- Debbie and Patty wonder if moving to somewhere else will change their lives. They wonder how they'd be different if they lived somewhere else, too. This is part of their search for their identity.
- Peter believes that travel helps you find out things about yourself that you didn't know. Then, when you return to your ordinary routine, you find that you have changed in a small but significant way. Peter and Debbie try this by spending a day in the next town. This scene shows one way the characters are trying to find their identity and discover who they are and where they fit in the universe.
- At the end of the novel, Hector and Debbie see each other for a moment, but the moments are not aligned. In effect, they "criss cross," and the connection is not made. Thus, the novel ends on the same note on which it began.
- At the very end of the novel, someone opens the jar and releases the lightning bugs. They fly out into the night air, blinking "Here I am." The lightning bugs symbolize the novel's teenage characters, who assert their individuality as they become adults.

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

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

#### Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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