



The Great Gilly Hopkins

by Katherine Paterson

Teacher's Guide

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CLASSROOM FAVORITES

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Synopsis

Welcome to Thompson Park

Eleven-year-old Galadriel ("Gilly") Hopkins has been stuck in more foster families than she can remember, and she's disliked them all. Now her social worker Miss Ellis is taking Gilly to her latest family, Maime Trotter and her foster child William Ernest Teague. Gilly immediately decides that the overweight Maime is "gross" and the withdrawn William Ernest is a "freaky kid." The house is "ugly and dirty" as well, which helps Gilly stick to her resolve to be as unpleasant as possible.

The Man Who Comes to Supper

Trotter puts up with Gilly's rudeness, but when Gilly mocks William Ernest, Trotter stands up for him. Trotter sends Gilly next door to bring Mr. Randolph for dinner. Gilly is repulsed by the gentle blind black man because she is prejudiced. Fine families like hers would never eat with "colored people," Gilly thinks. During the bountiful dinner, Trotter and Mr. Randolph engage in pleasant conversation. Nonetheless, Gilly is certain that her mother Courtney Rutherford Hopkins is going to come and get her soon because her mother would never let her stay with such awful people.

More Unpleasant Surprises

Trotter is delighted that William Ernest has improved enough to be placed in a higher reading group, but Gilly is unimpressed. Gilly is furious when Trotter gently asks her to make her bed. Then Trotter takes Gilly to school, where the principal Mr. Evans places her in Miss Harris'

sixth grade class. Miss Harris, a black woman, recognizes that Gilly's name came from Tolkien, which Gilly didn't know. Gilly is furious that the teacher and almost half the class is black. Later, Gilly gets in trouble for fighting on the playground. The principal has read the comments from Gilly's former teachers and principal at Hollywood Gardens and gently asks her to make a fresh start, but Gilly is unrepentant. She is determined to make as much trouble as possible.

"Sarsaparilla to Sorcery"

Gilly meets ill-kept, poor Agnes Stokes at recess. Agnes wants to be friends and Gilly agrees only because she thinks Agnes will come in useful. Back at Trotter's house, Gilly finds a postcard from her mother. It reads: "My dearest Galadriel, The agency wrote me that you had moved. I wish it were to here. I miss you. All my love, Courtney." Gilly finds her mother's address on the card and vows to find her, even though she is all the way across the country in California. Gilly snaps at Trotter and dreams of being reunited with her mother, whom she supposes from an old picture is both beautiful and charming. Trotter asks Gilly to read to Mr. Randolph.

They go to Mr. Randolph's home to find a book. Reaching behind the books, Gilly finds two five dollar bills. She quickly pockets them and grabs the book Mr. Randolph had requested, *The Oxford Book of Verse*. She reads several poems aloud, especially one by William Wordsworth. Mr. Randolph knows the poem by heart and is deeply moved by it, but Gilly is annoyed because she doesn't understand the poem fully. To everyone's surprise, William Ernest understands the poem and it touches his heart. Gilly decides to break into Mr. Randolph's house, steal the rest of his money, and use it to finance her trip to her mother.



William Ernest and Other Mean Flowers

As with Gilly, Agnes has a disrupted family: both her parents have deserted and Agnes lives with her grandparents. At lunch, Gilly is furious when Agnes reveals that she, too, gets free lunch. Gilly makes William Ernest a paper airplane to win him to her side. Trotter thanks Gilly for her kindness to William Ernest, who has been abused. Trotter has been working hard to help him regain his confidence.

Harassing Miss Harris

Gilly is all set to harass her English teacher as she has with all her other teachers, but Miss Harris is not dependent on her students for validation. In an attempt to rattle Miss Harris, Gilly creates a racist drawing and slips it onto Miss Harris' desk. Later, Miss Harris tells Gilly that they are really very much alike because they are both filled with anger. Miss Harris also thanks Gilly for her card because it helped her release some of her anger. Gilly curses all the way home.

Dust and Desperation

Gilly realizes that she must leave Trotter and Thompson Park soon because she is becoming soft, losing her anger. With Agnes' help, Gilly steals all the money she can find from Mr. Randolph's house— \$34.00. She writes a letter to her mother telling her that she is saving up her money to come and live with her. She also lies about life at Trotter's house, saying that she is expected to do most of the work and take care of a retarded boy

The One-Way Ticket

Gilly attends Sunday School as Trotter attends church. After church, Mr. Randolph says that his son is coming for a visit. Trotter offers him a necktie that belonged to her husband. As Gilly goes up to get it, she sees that Trotter has cashed her welfare check. Gilly quickly takes the money—\$100—and then brings the tie downstairs. Trotter tells Gilly she plans to use part of the support check to buy Gilly a warm new jacket. Gilly sneaks out to the bus station and buys the ticket, which costs \$136.60. The ticket seller, realizing that something is amiss, calls the police, who take Gilly to the police station. Within half an hour, Trotter and William Ernest come to pick her up. The police want to keep Gilly overnight, but Trotter objects strenuously. Gilly returns home with them, her heart melted by William Ernest's love for her.

Pow

Miss Ellis, the social worker, shows up to remove Gilly. Trotter cries that she felt like dying when Gilly ran away to the bus station. Gilly agrees to stay with Trotter. When Trotter realizes that Gilly stole from Mr. Randolph, she insists that Gilly return the money immediately. Then

she works out a way for Gilly to pay back the money that she gave to Agnes for helping her steal. Gilly teaches William Ernest to fight back when he is picked on. Trotter kisses Gilly in gratitude and Gilly doesn't wipe the kiss off.

The Visitor

The week before Thanksgiving, everyone gets the flu but Gilly, who nurses them all. In the midst of this, a small elderly well-dressed woman comes for a visit. The woman is Gilly's grandmother, Courtney's mother, who had not realized that her daughter had a child. The grandmother, Mrs. Rutherford Hopkins, believes the lies that Gilly wrote in the letter to Courtney, and so thinks that Gilly is being abused. She promises to rescue Gilly, but Gilly swears that she will never leave Trotter, whom she has come to love.

Never and Other Canceled Promises

Trotter tells Gilly that her grandmother wants Gilly to live with her permanently. Gilly throws a tantrum, screaming that Trotter won't let them take her away but Trotter is powerless to stop the state. Neither can Miss Ellis change what Gilly has set into motion.

The Going

Trotter makes a special dinner, but no one can eat much because they are so upset. Mr. Randolph gives Gilly his beloved book of poetry as a farewell gift. That night, Gilly wakes up crying and Trotter comforts her.

Jackson, Virginia

Mrs. Hopkins takes Gilly to her home in Jackson, Virginia. Gilly had believed that her grandmother is rich and finds that she isn't. She is living on a small income, but tries to make Gilly feel welcome and secure.

She'll be Riding Six White Horses (When She Comes)

Gilly writes letters to William Ernest lying about her wealth to make him feel better. He answers her letters. Gilly and her grandmother get news that Courtney is coming for a visit. In anticipation, they put up a Christmas tree.

Homecoming

Gilly is shocked to see that her beautiful mother is a plump flower child with long, greasy hair. Courtney and her mother clash almost at once, as Courtney is petulant and spoiled. Gilly is shattered to realize that Courtney didn't come to see her; she came only because her mother paid her to. She has no plans to stay and no plans to take Gilly back with her. Gilly calls Trotter, who tells her that all "that stuff" about happy endings is a lie. Gilly wants to return to Trotter, but that isn't possible. Gilly tells Trotter that she loves her. Trotter is, in effect, her real mother.

Timeline of Foster Care and Orphanages

<p>1851 Massachusetts passes the first modern adoption law, recognizing adoption as a social and legal operation.</p>	<p>1915 Bureau for Exchange of Information Among Child-Helping Organizations founded (renamed Child Welfare League of America in 1921).</p>
<p>1854 New York Children’s Aid Society launches the orphan trains.</p>	<p>1917 Minnesota passes first law mandating social investigation of all adoptions and providing for the confidentiality of adoption records.</p>
<p>1868 Massachusetts Board of State Charities begins paying for children to board in private family homes, the start of the movement to care for foster children in families rather than institutions.</p>	<p>1919 The Russell Sage Foundation publishes the first professional child-placing manual.</p> <p>The first empirical field studies of adoption gather basic information about how many adoptions were taking place, of whom, and by whom.</p>
<p>1872 New York State Charities Aid Association is organized. By 1922, homes for more than 3300 children had been found.</p>	<p>1921 Child Welfare League of America adopts a Constitution that defines standard-setting as one of the organization’s core purposes.</p>
<p>1898 The Catholic Home Bureau is organized in New York by the St. Vincent De Paul Society. It was the first Catholic agency to place children in homes rather than orphanages, a model soon followed in other cities.</p>	<p>American Association of Social Workers founded.</p> <p>1924 First major outcome study, <i>How Foster Children Turn Out</i>, published.</p>
<p>1904 The first school of social work, the New York School of Applied Philanthropy, opens.</p>	<p>1935 Social Security Act included provision for aid to dependent children, crippled children’s programs, and child welfare, which eventually leads to a dramatic expansion of foster care.</p>
<p>1909 First White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children declared that poverty alone should not be grounds for removing children from families.</p>	<p>1937 Child Welfare League of America initiative that distinguishes minimum standards for permanent (adoptive) and temporary (foster) placements.</p>
<p>1910- First specialized adoption agencies founded, including the Spence Alumni Society, the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee, the Alice Chapin Nursery (all in New York) and the Cradle in Evanston, Illinois.</p>	<p>1939 Valentine P. Wasson publishes <i>The Chosen Baby</i>, a landmark in the literature on telling children about their adopted status.</p>
<p>1912 Congress creates the U.S. Children’s Bureau in the Department of Labor “to investigate and report on all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people.” Julia Lathrop is appointed as its first chief, the first woman to head a federal agency.</p>	<p>1944 In <i>Prince v. Massachusetts</i>, a case involving Jehovah’s Witnesses, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the state’s power as <i>parens patriae</i> to restrict parental control in order to guard “the general interest in youth’s well being.”</p>
<p>1912 Commercial maternity homes and adoption ad investigations are established in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Chicago, and other cities.</p>	<p>1948 The first recorded transracial adoption of an African-American child by white parents. It takes place in Minnesota.</p> <p>1949 New York becomes the first state to pass a law against black market adoptions, which proves unenforceable in practice.</p>

- 1953** Uniform Adoption Act first proposed.
- 1955** Child Welfare League of America national conference on adoption announces the era of special needs adoption.

Congressional inquiry into interstate and black market adoptions suggests that poor adoption practices create juvenile delinquency.
- 1957** U.S. adoption agencies sponsor legislation to prohibit or control proxy adoptions.
- 1958** Child Welfare League of America publishes *Standards of Adoption Service* (revised in 1968, 1973, 1978, 1988, 2000).
- 1959** UN Assembly adopts Declaration of the Rights of the Child.
- 1960** Study claims that adopted children are 100 times more likely than their non-adopted counterparts to show up in clinical populations.
- 1961** The Immigration and Nationality Act incorporates, for the first time, provisions for the international adoption of foreign-born children by U.S. citizens.
- 1965** The Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions launches the first organized program of single-parent adoptions in order to locate homes for hard-to-place children with special needs.
- 1966** The National Adoption Resource Exchange, later renamed the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA), is established.
- 1969** President Nixon creates the Office of Child Development in HEW to coordinate and administer Head Start and U.S. Children's Bureau functions.
- 1970** Adoptions reach their century-long peak at approximately 175,000 per year. Almost 80 percent of the total are arranged by agencies.
- 1971** Florence Fisher founds the Adoptees Liberty Movement Association "to abolish the existing practice of sealed records" and advocate for

"opening of records to any adopted person over eighteen who wants, for any reason, to see them."

- 1973** Roe v. Wade legalizes abortion.
- 1980** Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act offers significant funding to states that support subsidy programs for special needs adoption and devote resources to family preservation, reunification, and the prevention of abuse, neglect, and child removal.
- 1989** UN Convention on the Rights of the Child held.
- 1997** Adoption and Safe Families Act stresses permanency planning for children and represents a policy shift away from family reunification and toward adoption.
- 2000** The Child Citizenship Act of 2000 allows foreign-born adoptees to become automatic American citizens when they enter the United States, eliminating the legal burden of naturalization for international adoptions.

Census 2000 includes "adopted son/daughter" as a kinship category for the first time in U.S. history.

Author Sketch

Katherine Paterson has enjoyed a most unusual life. Born in 1932 in Huayin, China, the daughter of missionaries, she spent her first five years there. She wrote in *Horn Book*, "If I tell you that I was born in China of Southern Presbyterian missionary parents, I have already given away the three chief clues to my tribal memory." In an interview with Gary D. Schmidt, Paterson revealed that her main influences are her Presbyterian background, her childhood in China, and her years living in the southern United States. Because of her father's work, Paterson attended eighteen schools, which left her with a deep sense of being an outsider.



She took refuge in reading and writing. After moving to Winston-Salem, Paterson discovered the school library. She wrote, "I do not think it would be hyperbolic to say that it saved my sanity." By the time that she was in fifth

grade, Paterson's writing had begun to gain her some recognition. But despite her love of books and literature, Paterson didn't seek a career as a writer. "When I was ten," she wrote on her Web site, "I wanted to be either a movie star or a missionary."

Religion and missionary work have deeply informed her life, as her education and career show. She earned her AB from King College in Tennessee in 1954 and her MA from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in 1957. Paterson next studied at the Naganuma School of Japanese Language in Kôbe, Japan, for two years (1957-1959). She completed her postgraduate study at the Union Theological Seminary in 1962.

Paterson taught from 1954-55 at the Presbyterian Church in the United States. She served as a Christian Education assistant and missionary on Shikoku Island, Japan from 1957 to 1961. Paterson fell in love with John Barstow Paterson, a Presbyterian minister from Buffalo, New York. The couple married in 1962. From 1963-1965, she worked as a teacher at the Pennington School for Boys, Pennington, N.J.

In 1964, Paterson accepted her first professional writing assignment: creating Sunday School curriculum for the Presbyterian Church. The lessons were for students in grades 5-6.

Nine years later, Paterson published her first work of fiction, *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*, a historical young adult novel set in Japan during the twelfth century. Critics praised the novel for its characterization, authentic background, and fast pace. Paterson also set her next book, *Of Nightingales That Weep*, in Japan in the twelfth century; however, this tale features an eleven-year-old girl as its main character. Paterson's next work, *The Master Puppeteer*, generally is considered the most outstanding of her three novels set in feudal Japan.

Bridge to Terabithia is credited as the novel in which Paterson found her true voice as a writer. The book was inspired by the death of her son David's best friend, Lisa Hill, who was struck by lightning at age eight. The novel received the Newbery Medal and the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, along with several other prizes. Paterson received her second Newbery Medal for *Jacob Have I Loved*, which often is considered her best and most complex book. Most recently, Paterson won the 2006 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for Literature.

Writing in *Theory into Practice*, Paterson stated, "I have not written a book for children unless the book is brought to life by the child who reads it. . . . My aim is to do my part so well that the young reader will delight to join me as co-author. My hope (for there are no guarantees) is that children in succeeding generations will claim this story as their own." Paterson and her husband make their home in Vermont.

Critic's Corner

Paterson is regarded as a major writer whose honesty, compassion, literary skill, and themes of freedom and unification show sincere respect for young people while demonstrating her faith in humanity. Ilene Cooper of *Booklist* called Paterson "arguably the premier author among children's book writers today."

The Great Gilly Hopkins was named an American Library Association Notable Children's Book and a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, both in 1978. The novel also received a National Book Award, a Newbery Honor Award, a Jane Addams Children's Book Award, and a Christopher Award, all in 1979. Reviews were enthusiastic.

Reviewing *The Great Gilly Hopkins* in the *Washington Post Book World*, Natalie Babbitt said, "Gilly is a liar, a bully, a thief; and yet, because Paterson is interested in motivations rather than moralizing, the reader is free to grow very fond of her heroine. . . . What Paterson has done is to combine a beautiful fairness with her affection for her creations, which makes them solidly three dimensional." In the same publication, Anne Tyler concluded, "I'd adopt [Gilly] any day."

Other Books by Katherine Paterson

For Children and Young Adults

The Sign of the Chrysanthemum (1973)

Of Nightingales That Weep (1974)

The Master Puppeteer (1975)

Bridge to Terabithia (1977)

Angels and Other Strangers: Family Christmas Stories (1979)

Jacob Have I Loved (1980)

(Translator) Sumiko Yagawea, reteller, *The Crane Wife* (1981)

Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom (1983)

Come Sing, Jimmy Jo (1985)

(With husband, John Paterson) *Consider the Lilies: Flowers of the Bible* (1986)
(Translator) Momoko Ishii, reteller, *The Tongue-Cut Sparrow* (1987)
The Smallest Cow in the World (1988)
Park's Quest (1988)
(Reteller) *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks* (1990)
Lyddie (1991)
The King's Equal (1992), reissued as a chapter book (1999)
Flip-Flop Girl (1994)
A Midnight Clear: Stories for the Christmas Season (1995)
(Reteller) *The Angel and the Donkey* (1996)
Jip: His Story (1996)
Marvin's Best Christmas Present Ever (1997)
Celia and the Sweet, Sweet Water (1998)
(With husband, John Paterson) *Images of God: Views of the Invisible* (1998)
(Reteller) *Parzival: The Quest of the Grail Knight* (1998)
Preacher's Boy (1999)
Marvin One Too Many (2001)
The Field of the Dogs (2001)
The Wide-Awake Princess (2001)
The Same Stuff as Stars (2002)

For Adults

Gates of Excellence: On Reading and Writing Books for Children (1981)
The Spying Heart: More Thoughts on Reading and Writing Books for Children (1989)
Stick to Reality and Dream: Celebrating America's Young Readers: A Lecture for the Year of the Young Reader, Presented on November 17, 1988, at the Library of Congress (lecture), Library of Congress (Washington, DC), 1990.
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Paterson has also written religious education material.

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Twentieth-Century Children's Writers, 4th edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1995.

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Booklist, September 1, 1996, Hazel Rochman, review of *Jip: His Story*, p. 127; August, 1999, Ilene Cooper, review of *Preacher's Boy*, p. 2044.
Christian Science Monitor, May 3, 1978, Jill Paton Walsh, review of *Bridge to Terabithia*, p. B2; January 21, 1981, Betty Levin, "A Funny, Sad, Sharp Look Back at Growing Up," p. 17.
Entertainment Weekly, May 1, 1992, Michele Landsberg, review of *Bridge to Terabithia*, p. 64.
Horn Book, August, 1978, Virginia Buckley, "Katherine Paterson," p. 370; August, 1978, Katherine Paterson, "Newbery Award Acceptance," pp. 361-367; May-June, 1981, Elizabeth S. Watson, review of *Lyddie*, pp. 339-339; December, 1981, Katherine Paterson, "Sounds in the Heart," pp. 694-702.
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Kirkus Reviews, January 15, 1975, review of *The Master Puppeteer*, p. 71.

New York Times Book Review, May 22, 1994, Jane Resh Thomas, "Nobody Understands Vinnie," p. 20; November 10, 1996, Kathleen Jewett, "The People Nobody Wants," p. 50.

Publishers Weekly, April 19, 1976, review of *The Master Puppeteer*, p. 85.

School Librarian, December, 1981, Dennis Hamley, review of *Jacob Have I Loved*, p. 349.

Theory into Practice, autumn, 1982, Katherine Paterson, "The Aim of the Writer Who Writes for Children," pp. 325-330.

Voice of Youth Advocates, April, 1991, Mary L. Adams, review of *Lyddie*, p. 34.

Washington Post Book World, May 14, 1978, Natalie Babbitt, "A Home for Nobody's Child," pp. 1-2; November 9, 1980, Anne Tyler, "Coming of Age on Rass Island," pp. 11, 16.

Writer, August, 1990, Katherine Paterson, "What Writing Has Taught Me: Three Lessons," pp. 9-10.

General Objectives

1. To understand that Gilly is a foster child
2. To analyze why Gilly is going to Thompson Park
3. To probe Gilly's anger
4. To trace the relationship between Gilly and Trotter
5. To probe the meaning of the novel's title
6. To analyze the symbolism in the novel
7. To recognize the novel's theme
8. To describe the novel's plot
9. To identify foreshadowing and flashback in the novel
10. To understand the novel's ending

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze why Gilly's mother has turned her daughter over to foster care
2. To understand that Gilly contrives to have herself thrown out of her foster homes
3. To explore Gilly's anger at being rejected by her mother
4. To probe the reasons for Gilly's racism
5. To understand why Gilly robs Trotter and Mr. Randolph
6. To explore the symbolism of the book of poetry
7. To compare and contrast Agnes and Gilly
8. To explore the ironic ending: Gilly gets herself ejected from the one home she wishes to have
9. To understand that Trotter becomes Gilly's surrogate mother and that they love each other
10. To determine what Gilly learns from this experience and how she changes as a result of it

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Katherine Paterson's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Irony: occurs when something happens that is different from what was expected. In irony of situation, an event reverses what the readers or characters expected. *The Great Gilly Hopkins* is rich in irony of situation, especially the ending. Readers have come to expect that novels end happily, with a sympathetic main character getting what he or she desires. *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, however, reverses this expectation: we expect Gilly will be able to stay with Trotter but she is forced to leave. Ironically, the reversal is a result of Gilly's own doing: by writing the letter full of lies to her mother, Gilly has sealed her own fate. Lest we miss the irony, Trotter says: "...all that stuff about happy endings is lies. The only ending in the world is death."

Symbolism: occurs when an image stands for something other than what was expected. The ocean, for example, may be said to symbolize "eternity" and the phrase "river to the sea" could stand for "life flowing into afterlife." In most instances the symbol does not directly reveal what it stands for; rather, the meaning must be discovered through a close reading of the literary work and an understanding of conventional literary and cultural symbols. For example, we realize that the "stars and stripes" stands for the American flag. We know this because we are told it is so, for the flag itself in no way looks like the United States. Without cultural agreement, many of the symbols we commonly accept would be meaningless. In *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, the major symbol is *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. It is Mr. Randolph's most cherished book. By giving it to Gilly, he is passing on not only the heritage of Western literature but also an appreciation for art, beauty, and human potential.

Theme: the main idea of a literary work, its a general statement about life. The theme can be stated outright in the work, or readers will have to infer it from details about plot, characters, and setting. Readers must infer the theme of *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. It concerns the supreme importance of love and belonging. We often find both in the most unexpected places, Paterson suggests.

The Importance of Setting

The Great Gilly Hopkins opens in Thompson Park, Maryland, and concludes in Jackson, Virginia. Both settings are made-up places. They are important only because they are relatively close, which means that Gilly will be able to visit Trotter and William Ernest. Their proximity makes it easier for William Ernest to stay in touch with Gilly as well.

Gilly's birth mother Courtney lives in San Francisco, California, which is a real place, of course. This setting is highly symbolic and thus important to the novel. Courtney is a hippie, a flower child who dropped out of society to "do her own thing." San Francisco was the mecca of people who rejected conventional society in the 1970s. By having Courtney live in San Francisco, Paterson is telegraphing her beliefs, lifestyle, and lack of responsibility toward her daughter. Since Gilly's father is never mentioned in the novel, it appears that he was a transitional figure in Courtney's life. This is also representative of many people in the hippie movement.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Novels

Joan Bauer, *Hope Was Here*
Meg Cabot, *The Princess Diaries*
Jenny Carroll, *Shadowland*
Sarah Dessen, *Dreamland*
Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*
Davida Wills Hurwin, *A Time for Dancing*
E. L. Konigsburg, *Silent to the Bone*
Gail Carson Levine, *Ella Enchanted*
Lois Lowry, *Gathering Blue*
Louise Rennison, *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*
Jacqueline Woodson, *If You Come Softly*

Audio

Bridge to Terabithia
The Great Gilly Hopkins
Flip-Flop Girl
Jacob Have I Loved
Liddy
Of Nightingales That Weep
The Master Puppeteer
The Sign of the Chrysanthemum

Media Adaptations of Paterson's Novels

Bridge to Terabithia was released as an audio cassette with filmstrip, a sound recording, a film (Public Broadcasting System), and a play
The Great Gilly Hopkins was released as a sound recording and as a film by Hanna-Barbera
Jacob Have I Loved was filmed for PBS

Media Interviews with Paterson

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Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Katherine Paterson's *The Great Gilly Hopkins* should include these aspects:

Themes

- anger
- education
- family
- foster care
- love
- money
- parenting
- poetry
- rejection
- theft

Motifs

- being a foster child
- yearning to live with your birth mother
- feeling great anger at your mother's rejection
- stealing money from friends
- trying to run away from your home
- being an excellent student
- analyzing and enjoying poetry
- finding love in an unexpected place
- becoming part of a family
- discovering a long-lost granddaughter

Meaning Study

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

1. My dearest Galadriel, The agency wrote me that you had moved. I wish it were to here. I miss you. All my love, Courtney. (p.34)
(Courtney is Gilly's mother. A flower child, Courtney lives in San Francisco and pursues her own life. Her letter appears loving and kind, but it is actually very cruel. She doesn't want Gilly to live with her at all; actually, she wants nothing to do with the child. She sends "all her love," but feels nothing for her daughter. This is shown especially at the end of the novel, when her mother has to pay her to come and visit Gilly.)
2. She took his elbow and guided him carefully down the stairs, taking care not to look back over her shoulder because the look on Trotter's face

was the one Gilly had, in some deep part of her, longed to see all her life, but not from someone like Trotter. (p. 69)

(It is plain from this scene that Trotter has come to love Gilly as a mother loves a daughter. This scene foreshadows the ending, when Trotter selflessly gives up Gilly because she believes it is best for the child to live with her grandmother and so perhaps one day be reconciled with her mother. This selflessness is one of the true definitions of love.)

3. "You may find this very hard to believe, Gilly, but you and I are very much alike." (p. 70)
(Gilly makes a racist card for Miss Harris in an attempt to make her angry. Miss Harris correctly surmises that she and Gilly are very similar because they are both highly intelligent and they are both very angry. Miss Harris denies her anger, but Gilly exposes hers. We can infer that Miss Harris is angry because of racism; it is plain that Gilly is angry because she has been rejected by her mother and a series of foster mothers.)
4. At the present time, it is very desperate, or I would not bother you. The foster mother is a religious fanatic. Besides she can hardly read and write and has a very dirty house and weird friends. (p. 92)
(Gilly writes this letter to her mother in an attempt to get her mother to take her in. As Gilly freely acknowledges, the letter is filled with lies. For instance, Trotter is deeply religious, but not a "fanatic": she does not force her beliefs on Gilly. Ironically, Gilly's letter blows up in her face. The social worker believes Gilly's lies and removes her from Trotter's home—where Gilly now desperately wants to stay. Gilly is placed with her grandmother, her mother's mother, but she has come to realize that Trotter is the only "real" mother she has ever known.)
5. She wrote "Love" and then changed it to Yours sincerely, your daughter, Galadriel Hopkins. (p.92)
(Even as she writes the letter to her mother, Gilly recognizes that she doesn't love her mother; she doesn't know her mother well enough to feel any love toward her. This is the beginning of Gilly's realization that her mother is not the ideal that she had long imagined.)
6. The ice in her frozen brain rumbled and cracked. She stood up and took his hand. (p. 111)
(Gilly's resolve to run away begins to waver when William Ernest begs her to come home. Gilly realizes that William Ernest loves her as a sister. She also understands that Trotter loves her as well, with a mother's unselfish and devoted love.)
7. Trotter came over to her and laid her arm heavily on Gilly's shoulder. "If she knowed you—if she just knowed what a girl she has—she'd be here in a

minute.”(p. 116)

(Miss Ellis tells Gilly that her mother does not want her. While this is true, it just makes the situation worse. Trotter, in contrast, tells Gilly that her mother would want her if she only knew her. In so doing, Trotter affirms her love for Gilly and helps build her self-confidence and self-esteem. It is a kind and loving gesture.)

8. “My family’s been sick.”

Agnes sneered. “What family? Everybody knows...”

“My brother.” At this William Ernest raised his head up proudly. “My mother. And my—uncle.” (p. 142)
(In this scene, Gilly puts into words what she has long felt: she has a family and they love each other very much. Paterson’s point here is that “family” can be defined in many ways: by choice as well as by birth. Paterson and her husband have welcomed adoptive children as well as birth children into their family.)

9. But this person wasn’t Courtney. It couldn’t be Courtney! Courtney was tall and willowy and gorgeous. The woman who stood before them was no taller than Nonnie and just as plump, although she wore a long cape, so it was hard to make out her real shape. (p. 174)

(Gilly had taken the old photograph of her mother as a beautiful teenager and from it, had idealized her mother as a beautiful, loving, and kind woman. The reality is quite different: Courtney looks nothing like her picture and acts nothing like Gilly had imagined. Courtney is no longer beautiful and has never been loving or kind. She is selfish and indifferent. Her indifference is far more hurtful than any overt cruelty could be.)

10. “Trotter” – She couldn’t push the word hard enough to keep the squeak out—“I love you.” (p. 178)

(Trotter has become Gilly’s real mother because she loves the girl truly, deeply, and unselfishly. Gilly realizes this and for the first and only time in the book utters the magic words: “I love you.” These are the words she had saved for so long to say to her birth mother, Courtney, but she realizes that Courtney fulfilled a biological function only. It is Trotter who has loved and nourished her. Trotter has, of course, done the most unselfish thing of all by helping Gilly to leave her home and thus mature.)

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. Where is Gilly going when the story opens?
(She is going to a new foster home with Maime Trotter.)
2. Whom does Trotter have over for dinner every night? Why?
(She has her neighbor Mr. Randolph over every night. She invites him out of simple human kindness because he lives alone and is lonely.)
3. Why does Gilly steal money from Trotter and Mr. Randolph?
(She wants to use the money to pay for a ticket to visit her mother in San Francisco. She hopes that her mother will want to care for her and they can live together.)
4. What skill does Gilly teach William Ernest?
(She teaches him how to defend himself physically, by fighting.)
5. Who gets custody of Gilly at the end of the novel?
(Gilly’s grandmother Mrs. Rutherford Hopkins gets custody. Gilly must live with her grandmother.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why do you think Courtney gave up Gilly and had her placed in the foster care system?
(Courtney appears to be selfish and immature. She likely didn’t want the trouble of taking care of a child then . . . or now.)
7. What is Paterson’s message about parenting?
(Being a good parent requires patience, values, and consistency. A parent is not defined by bonds of birth; rather, it depends on bonds of love and the desire to raise a child.)
8. Why is Gilly so angry?
(Gilly is angry because she has been rejected over and over. She has been shunted from person to person like a piece of lost baggage. Her birth mother doesn’t want her; several of her foster parents made promises to her that they could not or chose not to keep.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Do you like the ending? Why or why not?
(The ending makes logical sense. Even though Gilly doesn’t get what she wants – to live with Trotter—she is in a good home with a woman who will love and care for her.)
10. What meaning does the Wordsworth poem have in the novel?
(Paterson is a devout Christian. The poem expresses Paterson’s religious beliefs, most clearly seen in the lines: “But trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home. . .”)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. What will Gilly's life be like ten years in the future? Write a brief description. Explain what she is doing and where she is living.
12. Working with a partner, role-play a dialogue between Gilly and Courtney in which Courtney explains why she placed her daughter in foster care and does not want to see her.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. Draw the tie that Trotter gives Mr. Randolph. Then design a new tie for him. The tie should suit the occasion (a visit from his son) as well as Mr. Randolph's personality.
2. One of the chapters is called "She'll be Riding Six White Horses (When She Comes)." Get the lyrics for this song—"She'll be Coming 'Round the Mountain"—and sing the song for a small group of classmates.
3. Make some paper airplanes and fly them with some friends, as Gilly does with William Ernest.
4. Prepare a travel brochure for San Francisco, California, where Courtney lives.
5. Make a new cover for the novel. Your cover should entice readers but not give away too much of the plot.

Language Arts

1. The characters in this novel—especially Gilly herself—have unusual names. Give yourself a new name that you believe describes your character.
2. Miss Harris tells Gilly that her name comes from *The Hobbit*. Read *The Hobbit* and explain what Gilly's name means. Why do you think her mother chose it?
3. Write Gilly's report card from her last year at Hollywood Gardens. Include comments from her principal and fifth grade teacher about her attitude and behavior.
4. Write William Ernest's backstory. How did he come to live with Trotter? What has made him so fearful?

5. Read the Wordsworth poem in the book and explain why Paterson chose it for inclusion. What does this poem add to your understanding of the novel's theme?

History/Social Studies

1. Gilly refers to "Billy Sunday." Explain the reference by writing a brief biography of Billy Sunday.
2. Mr. Randolph is a Baptist. Find out what Baptists believe. Share your findings in a report about this division of Christianity.
3. Write a report on the history of the foster care system in America. Include information on current laws and practices as well.
4. Gilly is prejudiced against African-Americans. Make a timeline of the Civil Rights Movement in America.

Speech/Drama

1. Working with some classmates, debate whether or not Gilly would be better off with her grandmother or with Maime Trotter.
2. In a speech, explain why Gilly misbehaves.
3. Gilly reads poetry to Mr. Randolph. Read some poetry to a friend of yours, especially someone who cannot read because of age or infirmity.
4. In a roundtable discussion, decide whether or not the ending is realistic. Provide specific examples to make your point.
5. Working with a partner, act out a scene in which Miss Ellis explains to her supervisor what problems she is having dealing with Gilly.

Science/Math

1. Gilly flies a paper airplane with William Ernest. Explain how a paper airplane, and by extension, a real airplane, flies.
2. Make a chart showing the number of foster children in your state. Compare this statistic to the number of children in foster care throughout the entire U.S.
3. Gilly steals money to pay for her ticket to San Francisco. Find out how much a bus ticket, a railroad ticket, and a plane ticket each cost to take you from your home town to San Francisco.

Calculate how long each method of transportation would take as well.

4. Trotter receives money from the state to support her foster children. Find out how much it costs to raise a child from birth to age 21.
5. Trotter makes a homemade dinner every night. Plan a week of meals for your family. Explain how each meal is nutritionally balanced.

Alternate Assessment

1. "When I look at the books I have written," Paterson commented in the *Horn Book*, "the first thing I see is the outcast child searching for a place to stand." Explain how this observation applies to *The Great Gilly Hopkins*.
2. Choose another poem that Mr. Randolph would like Gilly to read to him. Practice reading the poem. Then read it to a small group of friends. Explain its meaning and how it relates to Mr. Randolph's character.
3. In a speech, explain what you learned about being a good parent from this book.
4. Trotter makes Gilly work off her debt by doing chores. Devise another punishment for Gilly that is equally constructive and effective.
5. Draw a portrait of Gilly's family: Trotter, William Ernest, Mr. Randolph, and Gilly herself.

Teacher's Notes

Vocabulary

Complete the following crossword puzzle with these twelve words from *The Great Gilly Hopkins*.

Word Box

futile	frenzy	kin	puny
clamor	audible	fracas	sassy
despise	lint	salvage	yen

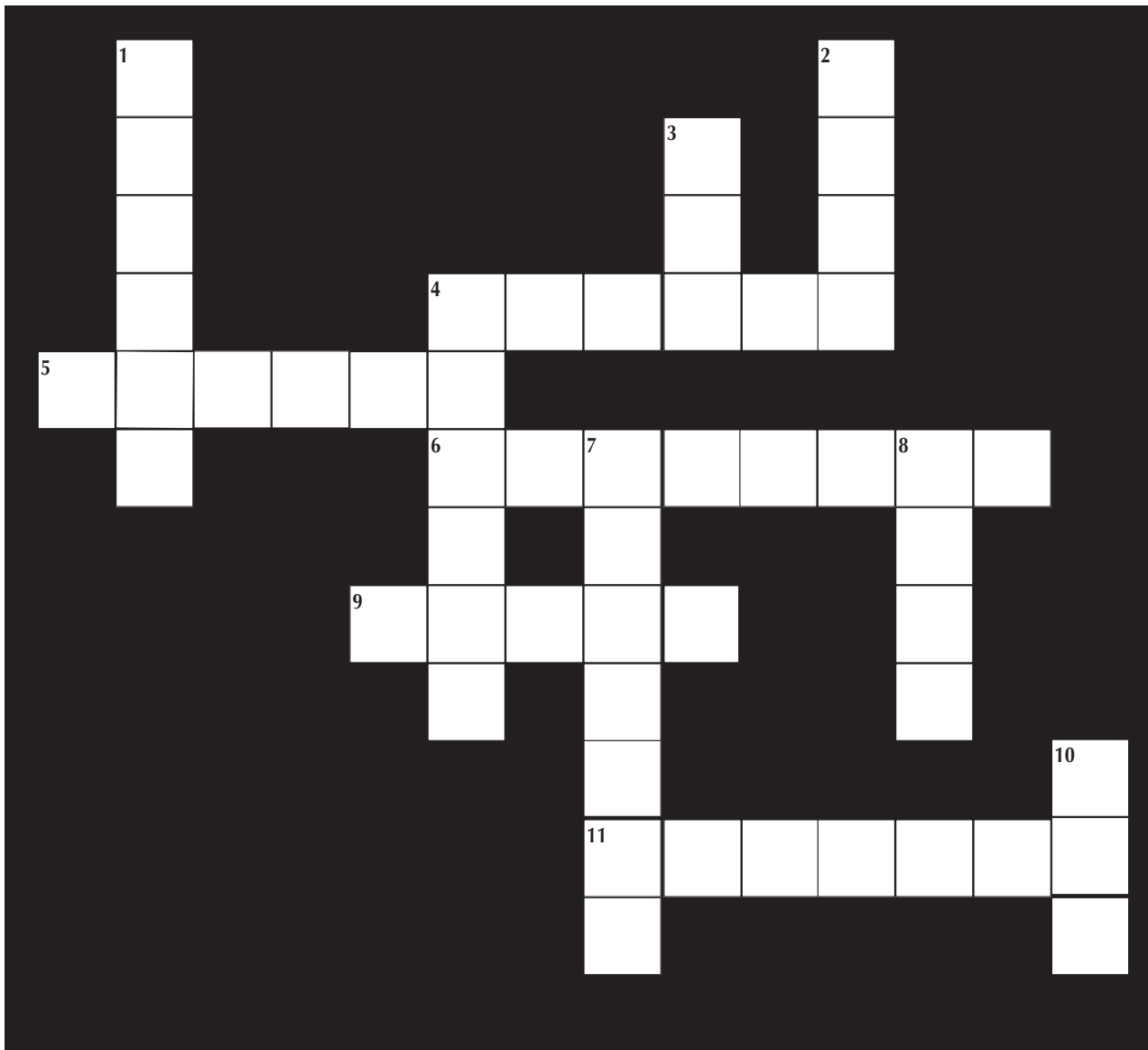
Clues

Across

- 4. wildness
- 5. noise
- 6. able to be heard
- 9. outspoken
- 11. save

Down

- 1. useless
- 2. small and weak
- 3. relatives
- 4. fight
- 7. hate
- 8. small pieces of fuzz
- 10. urge



Comprehension Test A

Part I: 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 blanks provided.

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Galadriel Hopkins | F. Mr. Randolph |
| B. Miss Ellis | G. Mr. Evans |
| C. Courtney | H. Miss Harris |
| D. Maime Trotter | I. Agnes Stokes |
| E. William Ernest Teague | J. Mrs. Rutherford Hopkins |

- ___ 1. Gilly's grandmother
- ___ 2. Gilly's sixth grade teacher
- ___ 3. Trotter's blind African-American neighbor
- ___ 4. foster child filled with rage
- ___ 5. sloppy, heavy-set foster mother who loves Gilly
- ___ 6. social worker
- ___ 7. elementary school principal
- ___ 8. poor, devious child who befriends Gilly
- ___ 9. Gilly's birth mother
- ___ 10. little boy who also lives with Trotter

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

- ___ 1. Gilly Hopkins is sixteen years old when the novel opens.
- ___ 2. Trotter's house is not well kept up. It is dusty and has old furniture. It is obvious that Trotter does not have a lot of money.
- ___ 3. Gilly's name come from a famous poem called "The Hobbit" by a British poet named William Wordsworth.
- ___ 4. Gilly gets in trouble for fighting on the playground. The principal has read the comments from her former teachers and gently asks her to make a fresh start, but Gilly is determined to make as much trouble as possible.
- ___ 5. Gilly's mother sends her a postcard every week and yearns to be reunited with her.
- ___ 6. Reaching behind the books at Mr. Randolph's home, Gilly finds \$100 in five-dollar bills. She keeps the money.
- ___ 7. In an attempt to rattle Trotter, Gilly creates a racist drawing, which she places on a card.
- ___ 8. Gilly writes a letter to her mother telling her that she is saving up her money to come and live with her. She also lies and states that she is expected to do most of the work in Trotter's house and take care of a retarded boy.
- ___ 9. Seeing that Trotter has cashed her welfare check, Gilly quickly takes the money—\$100—and then brings the necktie downstairs for Mr. Randolph.
- ___ 10. Gilly is shocked to see that her beautiful mother is a plump flower child with long, greasy hair.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the novel.

1. My dearest Galadriel, The agency wrote me that you had moved. I wish it were to here. I miss you. All my love, Courtney.
2. "You may find this very hard to believe, Gilly, but you and I are very much alike."
3. I received your card. I am sorry to bother you with my problems, but as my real mother, I feel you have a right to know about your daughter's situation.
4. "My family's been sick."
Agnes sneered. "What family? Everybody knows..."
"My brother." At this William Ernest raised his head up proudly. "My mother. And my—uncle."
5. "Trotter" – She couldn't push the word hard enough to keep the squeak out—"I love you."

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how the novel shows one of these themes: life is not fair, endings aren't always happy, rejected children suffer deeply.
2. Provide three details from the novel that make *The Great Gilly Hopkins* seem to be nonfiction, even though it is really fiction.
3. Analyze what makes Trotter such a good foster mother.
4. What function does William Ernest Teague serve in the novel?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Choose the word or phrase that best completes each of the following statements.

1. Gilly Hopkins is (**eleven, sixteen**) years old when the novel opens.
2. In the beginning of the story, Gilly is furious when Trotter gently asks her to (**take out the trash, make her bed**).
3. Gilly's name come from a novel called *The Hobbit* by (**Wordsworth, Tolkien**), which Gilly didn't know.
4. Gilly gets in trouble for (**fighting on the playground, setting a fire in the classroom**).
5. The principal has read the comments from Gilly's former teachers and principal at (**San Francisco, Hollywood Gardens**) and gently asks Gilly to make a fresh start, but Gilly is determined to make as much trouble as possible.
6. Reaching behind the books in Mr. Randolph's home, Gilly first finds two (**five, fifty**) dollar bills—which she steals.
7. Gilly makes William Ernest a (**kite, paper airplane**) and teaches him how to fly it.
8. In an attempt to rattle Miss Harris, Gilly makes a racist (**drawing, web site**), which Miss Harris discovers.
9. Trotter gives Mr. Randolph a (**necktie, book**) as a gift when his son comes for a visit.
10. At the end of the novel, Gilly goes to live with her (**birth mother, grandmother**).

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Mrs. Rutherford Hopkins | A. next-door neighbor; blind man |
| ___ 2. Maime Trotter | B. bright but angry foster child |
| ___ 3. Miss Ellis | C. little boy who had been abused |
| ___ 4. Miss Minnie Applegate | D. Courtney's mother |
| ___ 5. Galadriel Hopkins | E. African-American sixth grade teacher |
| ___ 6. Miss Harris | F. sneaky, poor girl who befriends Gilly |
| ___ 7. Mr. Randolph | G. Sunday school teacher |
| ___ 8. Mr. Evans | H. woman who loves Gilly and William |
| ___ 9. William Ernest Teague | I. elementary school principal |
| ___ 10. Agnes Stokes | J. social worker |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the story.

1. money
2. postcard
3. fresh-baked cookies
4. horses
5. *The Oxford Book of Poetry*

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Agnes and Gilly. Show how they are the same and different.
2. Explain why Gilly behaves so badly, especially in the beginning of the novel.
3. Write a letter in which you persuade a judge to allow Gilly to choose the person she wishes to live with.
4. Describe the qualities that make a good mother. Then show through specific examples which of the characters best embodies these qualities.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Across

- frenzy
- clamor
- audible
- sassy
- salvage

Down

- futile
- puny
- kin
- fracas
- despise
- lint
- yen

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

- Courtney is Gilly's mother. A flower child, Courtney lives in San Francisco and pursues her own life. Her letter appears loving and kind, but it is actually very cruel. She doesn't want Gilly to live with her at all; actually, she wants nothing to do with the child. She sends "all her love," but feels nothing for her daughter. This is shown especially at the end of the novel, when her mother has to pay her to come and visit Gilly.
- Gilly makes a racist card for Miss Harris in an attempt to make the teacher angry. Miss Harris correctly surmises that she and Gilly are very similar because they are both highly intelligent and they are both very angry. Miss Harris denies her anger, but Gilly exposes all of hers. We can infer that Miss Harris is angry because of racism; it is plain that Gilly is angry because she has been rejected by her birth mother and a series of foster mothers.
- Gilly writes this letter to her mother in an attempt to get her mother to take her in. Ironically, Gilly's letter blows up in her face. The social worker believes Gilly's lies and removes her from Trotter's home—where Gilly now desperately wants to stay. Gilly is placed with grandmother, her mother's mother, but she has come to realize that Trotter is the only "real" mother she has known.
- In this scene, Gilly puts into words what she has long felt: she has a family and they love each other very much. Paterson's point here is that "family" can be defined in many ways: by choice as well as by birth. Paterson and her husband have welcomed adoptive children as well as birth children into their family.

- Trotter has become Gilly's real mother because she loves the girl truly, deeply, and unselfishly. Gilly realizes this and for the first and only time in the book utters the magic words: "I love you." These are the words she had saved for so long to say to her birth mother, Courtney, but she realizes that Courtney fulfilled a biological function only. It is Trotter who has loved and nourished her. Trotter has, of course, done the most unselfish thing of all by helping Gilly to leave her home and thus mature.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. eleven | 6. five |
| 2. make her bed | 7. paper airplane |
| 3. Tolkien | 8. drawing |
| 4. fighting on the playground | 9. necktie |
| 5. Hollywood Gardens | 10. grandmother |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

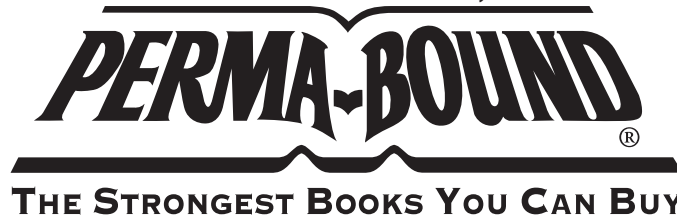
- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. D | 2. H | 3. J | 4. G | 5. B |
| 6. E | 7. A | 8. I | 9. C | 10. F |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

- Gilly needs money to leave Trotter's house and go find her mother. To get the money she needs, Gilly steals from both Mr. Randolph and Trotter. It is a testament to Trotter's fine parenting that she handles the thefts so calmly and effectively.
- Courtney sends a postcard to Gilly, expressing her love and wish that Gilly could come live with her. Courtney means nothing of the sort, and her perfidy harms Gilly tremendously. Further, the postcard contains Courtney's return address, which enables Gilly to trace her and plan her visit there.
- Trotter makes fresh-baked cookies for William Ernest and Gilly. Paterson uses the cookies as a symbol of motherhood, love, and caring.
- Gilly lies to William Ernest by telling him that her grandmother has horses. She does this to make the boy feel that she is living well and is happy in her new home. That way, he won't worry so much about her.
- The Oxford Book of Poetry* is the book of poetry that Mr. Randolph owns. When Gilly leaves Trotter's house to live with her grandmother, Mr. Randolph gives her the book of poetry. Trotter says that the book of poetry is like "a piece of himself" that he tore off to give to Gilly. He is giving her his most prized possession, a piece of his soul. He is, in effect, passing down the legacy of literature, art, culture, and love.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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