



The House of Dies Drear

Virginia Hamilton

Teacher's Guide

By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

At Easter on a March Saturday, his thirteenth birthday, Thomas Small, son of Walter and Martha Small, journeys up the Blue Ridge Mountain Highway through the Pisgah National Forest toward a new home in the Ohio Valley. In the car are his mother and twin baby brother, Buster and Billy. Behind is the North Carolina home of his great-grandmother Jeffers. Thomas is apprehensive because his father has taken a job in the history department of a small Ohio college and is moving the family to a supposedly haunted house where nobody has lived longer than three months for the last hundred years.

Chapter 2

As Thomas's father teaches him the history of the rambling gray house, the boy develops a consuming interest in the owner, Dies Drear, an eccentric New England abolitionist of considerable wealth who conceived a plan of sending runaway slaves back to the South to purchase the freedom of others in bondage. Now under the care of Henry Skinner, known locally as Mr. Pluto, it is a public landmark with a spooky reputation. It is supposedly haunted by two of three slaves, who were caught and killed by bounty hunters, and by Dies Drear, who was murdered that same week. According to legend, three ghosts haunt the premises: the spirits of two slaves and that of Drear himself. Mr. Small refuses to discuss a third slave.

Chapter 3

Mr. Small describes the limestone country that contains caves, lakes, and marshes. Thomas thinks of the three-story house as a moated castle. The furniture, which was sent a week earlier, is in place

and the dining room table sanded and polished. Thomas dislikes Mr. Pluto's interference in the arrangement of their new home. Thomas sets out to acquaint himself with the encircling verandah and environs of the family's new home, including a secret button above the knob of the great oak door, where cold air streams out. His twin brothers scream as though they have seen something. Thomas looks back to see the front steps lifted from the ground and swung left to reveal a jagged hole.

Chapter 4

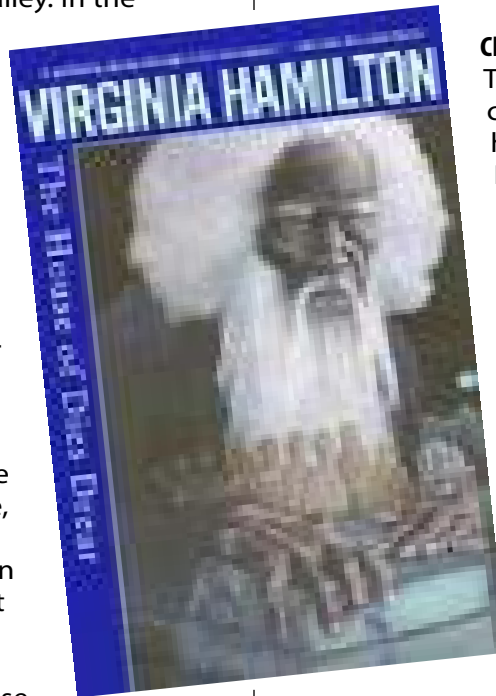
Thomas encounters Pesty, a small child atop a great black horse, and her companion, M.C. "Mac" Darrow. Pesty urges him not to enter the opening lest he get lost. At that moment, Thomas falls five feet into a secret tunnel beneath the front steps of the house and wanders down rock stairs and through a damp passageway. He uses a small flashlight to shine on the interior. In the distance, he hears water running. Terrified by forlorn sounds, he feels his way down an oak wall and arrives safely in the kitchen through a sliding panel.

Chapter 5

In the kitchen, the family is finishing supper. Mrs. Small is terrified by her son's discoveries and forbids him to explore the hole. Mr. Small traverses the tunnel. He opens a panel in a high cabinet to make the tunnel close and removes the mechanism. Mr. Small reveals more information about secret tunnels and hiding places where Dies Drear secreted slaves from bounty hunters. He warns of cave-ins. When Thomas strolls about the yard just before dark, he again hears the chilling noise that pursued him through the tunnel.

Chapter 6

Arriving at a wooden platform, Thomas hears the sighing sound again. He finds himself atop the cave inhabited by Pluto, the caretaker, who grabs



him and swings him into the air. Pluto accuses him of trying to scare him. Thomas escapes and runs so hard that he bursts the lock on the kitchen door and knocks dishes from the table.

Chapter 7

In the door stands Mr. Pluto, who wears thick gloves when he meets the family. He provokes suspicion in Thomas and his father. Mrs. Small introduces the family. Pluto explains why he chases away intruders. Mr. Small thanks him for placing the furniture in the room. Mr. Small asks about the horses; Pluto indicates they are sensitive to “haunted things.” Mr. Small declares that he is talking nonsense. Pluto recites a slave era chant and departs.

Chapter 8

Because Thomas destroyed the lock, Mr. Small is unable to close the door. He wonders about Pluto’s gloves and about his reason for staying when he is obviously afraid of the house. The family sips coffee and celebrates Thomas’s birthday. Mr. Small demonstrates sliding panels that hid arched cubicles large enough for a man to hide in. In his room, Thomas finds a wooden captain’s chair and a closet that piques his curiosity. An hour later, he goes downstairs to sleep on the sofa. In the night something pushes the mirror open, climbs the stairs, and leaves something in the doorframe of his parent’s room.

Chapter 9

The next morning, at each bedroom door, Mr. Small finds three tin and wood triangles pegged at the corner with a pin. He draws the shapes on paper and notes that the angle is made of gold. Thomas concludes that the arrangement of furniture urges the family to flee south. Mr. Small surmises that the three triangles fit together to form three sections of St. George’s cross. He decides not to call the police to determine who the intruder was and how he got in. He and Thomas decide to keep watch. Pluto and Pesty arrive in a buggy on their way to church. Mr. Small tells Thomas that the sound he heard in the tunnel was Pluto’s bellows.

Chapter 10

Thomas recalls that his father tried to interest him in the historical Negro church. At the Methodist church, there is hostility in the air as Mac plays the piano and four large men sit together on a pew. Galloping horses precede the arrival of Pesty and Pluto, who annoys one of the men by kneeling in the aisle. After church, Reverend Breckenridge

introduces himself, but no one returns home with the Smalls to listen to the historian.

Chapter 11

When Thomas and his father enter Mr. Small’s locked tower office at the college, Thomas complains about segregated churches. Below a bookcase, they find a fourth triangle, confirming their supposition that someone is trying to scare them. They eat at the college dining hall on a screened-in porch. Thomas considers visiting the big stone Presbyterian church. Mr. Small drives out Highway 68 to the filling station to ask the Carr boys to fix the lock. Mr. Carr remarks on the Darrow boys and passes on gossip about animosity between Grandfather River Swift Darrow and Pluto. Old Mr. Darrow is dead, but Wilbur is still alive. Carr declares that the Darrows are secretive.

Chapter 12

Mr. Small identifies Pluto as Henry Skinner. The family drives by Washington Junior High and High School near the Little Miami River. After a tour through town, they return home and discover that a prankster dumped flour over the kitchen floor and appliances, destroyed a set of dishes, and contaminated their refrigerated and canned food. Mr. Small locks Martha into her room and takes Thomas to search for intruders.

Chapter 13

Mr. Small and Thomas investigate Pluto’s cave house to get some answers about the unexplained happenings. In a cave beyond a clearing, they find Pluto walking about without his characteristic limp. Entering the cave in pursuit of the old caretaker, they search for a hidden room. After pulling on a rope, a wall slides, revealing a limestone chamber.

Chapter 14

Down a steep ramp and past the stalagmite and stalactites at the entrance is a great room where Pluto sits behind a massive Renaissance desk surrounded by tapestries, art India relics, silks, jewelry, and Dies Drear’s sparkling glassware, which Pesty carefully polishes. Pluto begins unfolding the reasons for the Smalls’ eerie reception. The neighboring Darrow family, led by River Lewis, wants Dies Drear’s treasure and seeks to scare the Smalls off the land. Pluto apologizes for fooling the Smalls. Suddenly, a second and much younger Pluto appears. Thomas and his father learn that Pluto’s son, Mayhew Skinner, an actor disguised with a rubber mask, cape and gloves, took his father’s

place. Thomas leaps on the devil man and coats his hands in false beard and makeup.

Chapter 15

Mayhew admits that he overplayed his part the previous night, when he first met the Smalls in the kitchen. The disguise became necessary in January when Carr informed him that Pluto was too ill to guard the treasure from the Darrows. Mayhew believes the slave heritage is too great an obsession for his father. Carr warned Mayhew that the Smalls were moving in and would jeopardize Pluto's beloved house and caverns. Mayhew arrived three weeks before the Smalls and set the furniture in the rooms. Then he plotted with the Carr boys to terrorize the Smalls. A week before, Pluto revealed the treasure to his son. Pluto defends Drear as a prophet. They assist Pluto to bed. He is comforted by having a history professor in the house. Pesty reveals that neither River Lewis nor Mac participated in dirtying the kitchen. Mayhew assumes that the culprits were Wilbur, Russell, and River Ross.

Chapter 16

At 1:30 a.m., Mayhew sits in the Smalls' kitchen. Mrs. Small urges him to rest. Mayhew looks forward to a part with a road company in another month, but wants to stabilize his father's life before departing. Mayhew proposes a plot to scare the Darrows and their compatriots, the Carr family, away from the Drear house. It will begin with false information that Pluto has been taken to a hospital. The reason for his sudden illness is that Mr. Small supposedly found something belonging to Dies Drear. Mayhew wonders why Pluto did not warn the Smalls about the entrance to the hall mirror. The passage behind the false wall leads under a stream to the Darrow and Carr property. Mayhew suggests that Thomas shop for their costumes, which will consist of rags and chains.

Chapter 17

Pluto refuses to go to the hospital. He accuses Mayhew of thievery and declares that the contents of the cave are his. Mr. Small contends that the foundation owns the land and caves and vows he will take nothing. He reminds Pluto that he is only the groundskeeper, not the owner. Mayhew responds that Drear willed the cavern and goods to the first son of slaves that found it. Mayhew adds that his ancestor was the third slave, who escaped bounty hunters and settled in Canada. Pluto is his great-great-grandson. Pluto remained alone studying the cave after Mayhew and his

mother left. He explains to Mr. Small that Drear used the four triangles individually as pointers to aid conductors in moving slaves to way stations. The final hiding place was the freeman's church, where a slave could blend in with the congregation. Pluto proposes playing himself to trick the Darrows, then determines to sleep through it. Mayhew gives in and lets him portray himself if he agrees to see a doctor.

Chapter 18

The Smalls had encountered the Darrows while buying paint and pretended that they took Pluto to the doctor in Columbus during the night. Mr. Small made no mention of the kitchen mess. In the night, Thomas lies in the dark with phosphorous tape on his face. Pesty is on guard to signal the Darrows' approach. Dressing up like slave ghosts, they lure the Darrows into the cave. When the Darrows arrive in the dark of night, Pluto makes his wrap into bat wings; Pesty drops a canvas and operates wings from the back of the bay horse. The lurking actors encircle the Darrows, clank, and moan. Mayhew laughs as the Darrows flee in terror, too ashamed to admit that they have been caught in the act of trespassing.

Chapter 19

Pesty falls asleep. Mayhew walks Thomas home. Mayhew admits that he feels closer to his father. The next morning, Thomas finds Pluto making a great lock. Freed from their tormentors, the Small family relaxes in their new surroundings. Mr. Small devotes himself to cataloging the precious objects and investigating their historical significance.

Author Sketch

Virginia Hamilton (1935-2002), a native of Yellow Springs, Ohio, grew up in an area that once served as a way station for the Underground Railroad.

The daughter of a musician, she went to Antioch College on a scholarship, graduating in 1955, and subsequently attended the Ohio State University (graduating in 1958) and New York's New School for Social Research. While at the New School, she met her future husband, poet Arnold Adoff, and worked toward her lifelong dream of becoming a professional writer. The pair had two children and eventually settled permanently in Yellow Springs.



Noted for sophisticated storytelling and a strong sense of atmosphere, Virginia Hamilton's work was heavily influenced by the rich traditions of her parents, who were both gifted storytellers. Her father, who ran gambling halls in mining towns, farmed the rich land of the Miami Valley, and her mother was a member of the Perry family and the eldest daughter of a former fugitive slave. From close ties with the Perry clan, Virginia Hamilton developed a narrative base for her prolific writing career—from Uncle King, an appreciation of tall tales, and from Aunt Leanna, the melancholy lyrics of songs. Writing for Hamilton was also an emotional release. Long affected by distrust and fear of the night, Hamilton said of her work: "With much of the gambler's instinct and something of the wanderer, I settle back with the coming of night to write in earnest. And that's happiness." Hamilton died of breast cancer in 2002. Her husband and two grown sons have continued her legacy, publishing posthumous works and managing her literary estate.

Critic's Corner

During a career spanning more than thirty years, celebrated children's author Virginia Hamilton won every major award in children's literature, including the first Newbery Award given to an African-American woman (for *M.C. Higgins the Great* in 1975, for which she also won the National Book Award and the Boston Globe Horn Book Award). She went on to win three Newbery Honors, three Coretta Scott King Awards, and a Hans Christian Andersen Medal, among many others. Sometimes referred to as "the Toni Morrison of children's literature," she was also the first children's writer to receive a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship. Other honors included the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, the Regina Medal, and an NAACP Image Award. In 2009, the American Library Association instituted the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award for excellence by African-American writers and illustrators.

The House of Dies Drear achieved "classic" status almost from its publication in 1968. It garnered the Ohioana Book Award, as well as the coveted Edgar Allen Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America, and was named an American Library Association Notable Book in 1968 and a "Best of the Best Books" by School Library Journal.

Timeline of the Action

pre-Civil War	Dies Drear aids runaway slaves at his home near Columbus, Ohio, until bounty hunters murder him and two slaves. A third slave escapes to Canada.
afterward	The Drear house sits empty for decades.
January (ca. 1968)	Pluto becomes ill.
30 years earlier	Pluto becomes obsessed with Dies Drear's treasure.
a week earlier	Mayhew Skinner arranges the Smalls' furniture in the house. Pluto reveals the Drear treasure to his son.
a Saturday in March	The Smalls journey from North Carolina to move into the house, which they have purchased.
supper time	Thomas falls five feet into a secret tunnel beneath the front steps of the house and arrives in the kitchen through a sliding panel.
before dark	Pluto grabs Thomas, but Thomas escapes and breaks the lock on the kitchen door.
later	Mayhew poses as Pluto when he meets the family.
after bedtime	As Thomas sleeps on the sofa, an intruder leaves triangles on bedroom door frames.
Sunday morning	Mr. Small fits the triangles into an incomplete St. George's cross.
before church	Pluto and Pesty arrive in a buggy on their way to the Methodist church. At church, Mac plays the piano.
after church	At Mr. Small's locked tower office at the college, they find a fourth triangle.
after lunch	Mr. Small asks the Carrs to fix the lock. Mr. Carr passes on gossip about animosity between Pluto and Grandfather River Swift Darrow.
that afternoon	The Smalls discover that a prankster has messed up

the kitchen. Mr. Small and Thomas find Pluto in a massive cavern surrounded by treasures. Mayhew Skinner appears.

early Monday Mayhew proposes a plot to scare the Darrows.

later that day Mr. Small and Thomas buy paint and supplies and greet the Darrows as though nothing happened to the kitchen.

that night When the Darrows arrive, Pluto makes his wrap into bat wings. Pesty operates wings from the back of the bay horse. The other actors terrorize the Darrows.

next morning Mr. Small begins cataloging the precious objects.

Selected Other Works by Virginia Hamilton

Zeely, 1967
The Time-Ago Tales of Jahdu, 1969
The Planet of Junior Brown, 1971
W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography, 1972
Time-Ago Lost: More Tales of Jahdu, 1973
M.C. Higgins, the Great, 1974
Paul Robeson: The Life and Times of a Free Black Man, 1974
Arilla Sun Down, 1976
Justice and Her Brothers, 1978
Jahdu, 1980
Dustland, 1980
The Gathering, 1981
Sweet Whispers, 1982
The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl, 1983
Willie Bea and the Time the Martians Landed, 1983
A Little Love, 1984
The People Could Fly, 1985
Junius Over Far, 1985
The Mystery of Drear House: The Conclusion of the Dies Drear Chronicle, 1987
A White Romance, 1987
In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World, 1988
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave, 1988
Bells of Christmas, 1989
The Dark Way: Stories from the Spirit World, 1990
Cousins, 1990
The All Jahdu Storybook, 1991

Many Thousand Gone, 1992
Drylongso, 1992
Plain City, 1993
Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales, 1995
Jaguarundi, 1995
When Birds Could Talk and Bats Could Sing: The Adventures of Bruh Sparrow, Sis Wren, and Their Friends, 1996
Ring of Tricksters: Animal Tales from America, the West Indies, and Africa, 1997
Second Cousins, 1998
Bluish: A Novel, 1999
The Girl Who Spun Gold, 2000

Published Posthumously:

Time Pieces: The Book of Times, 2001
Bruh Rabbit and the Tar Baby Girl, 2003
Wee Winnie Witch's Skinny: An Original African American Scare Tale, 2004
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General Objectives

1. To explain the creation and enhancement of suspense in a mystery story.
2. To analyze the strands of historical fact within fiction.
3. To discuss the motivation of secondary characters, such as the Carrs, great-grandmother Jeffers, Pesty, and the Darrows.
4. To account for the emphasis on setting in the story.
5. To discuss the deductive method of logic.
6. To consider the importance of prejudice as a secondary theme.
7. To note the use of insecurity as a vehicle for suspense.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe the Small family's various encounters with the two Mr. Plutos.
2. To understand Thomas's insecurity in his new home.
3. To list and explain small clues, such as the gloves, Mr. Pluto's black horse, the triangles, the arrangement of the Small's furniture, and the hall mirror.
4. To predict the future relationship of Mac Darrow and Thomas Small.
5. To contrast the confidence of Walter Small and Thomas with 'the weakness of Martha Small and Billy and Buster.
6. To account for Pesty's part in the plot against the Darrows.
7. To describe the Dies Drear house and grounds.
8. To explain the relationship between Henry and Mayhew Skinner.

9. To account for the black trunk in the final scene.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding *The House of Dies Drear*, consider the following terms and applications:

Character name: a method of displaying or revealing character traits, attributes, or attitudes through the choice of symbolic names, which may contain a descriptive term or allusion, as with Pluto, the name of the god of the underworld in Greek mythology. Likewise, Dies Drear is an evocative choice for the deceased abolitionist, a wealthy eccentric who converts the limestone caverns under his house into spooky passages to assist slaves in escaping pursuers on the Underground Railroad. The unusual name and legend exacerbate local fears of ghosts and help to terrify the Darrows when they intrude on Pluto's cavern.

Historic milieu: the setting of fictional events in a real period of history. Beginning over a century after the Civil War ended, the story teaches Thomas Small something of the perplexity and terror runaway slaves experienced as they shuttled from safehouse to safehouse, following triangular signs and trusting in the discretion of people like Dies Drear and other conductors to outsmart bounty hunters. Parallel to the main plot is Walter Small's contention that the church was and is a central institution in the lives of African-Americans and provided runaways the perfect cover when they needed a place to hide.

Motif: a pattern or predictable arrangement of elements to express an abstract theme in a story or other artistic work. Central to the narration are the trappings of ghosts, legends, suspense, disguises, secret latches and buttons, hidden rooms, and concealed treasure. The main character plunges into the mystery as soon as he arrives at his new home in Ohio by falling into a dark, dark tunnel under the front steps. The pattern of hidden passages and sliding panels continues throughout the story and serves as a romantic touch to Thomas's acclimation to a new life in Ohio.

Suspense: a literary device whereby the author holds the audience's attention through a buildup of mysterious events, with the promise that the mystery will ultimately be revealed. Hamilton uses this to great effect in building up, then revealing, both the historical and present-day mysteries sur-

rounding the house.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Books

- The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, Cornell University Press
- The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Ernest J. Gaines
- The Bean Trees*, Barbara Kingsolver
- Beloved*, Toni Morrison
- Elijah of Buxton*, Christopher Paul Curtis
- Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman*, Dorothy Sterling
- The Mystery of Dies Drear House: The Conclusion of the Dies Drear Chronicle*, Virginia Hamilton
- Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Frederick Douglass
- Nightjohn*, Gary Paulsen
- Roots*, Alex Haley
- Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to the 1790s*, Greenwood Press
- Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe

Films/Videos

- Amistad*
- The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*
- The House of Dies Drear*
- Beloved*
- Roots*

Internet

- "Abolition and Slavery,"
<<http://www.civilwar.com/abolition-and-slavery/>>
- "Harriet Tubman,"
<<http://www.harriettubman.com/>>
- "National Geographic presents: The Underground Railroad,"
<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/>>.
- "National Underground Railroad Freedom Center,"
<<http://undergroundrailroad.com/>>

Themes and Motifs

Themes

- Underground Railroad
- Slavery

- Self-determination
- Family connections
- Architecture
- Freedom from various kinds of oppression

Motifs

- Historical connections
- Solving mysteries
- The underworld
- Hidden treasure--both physical treasure, and the "treasure" of discovery and understanding
- Dual/hidden identities

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the story. Explain the meaning each has in this book. Page numbers are given so you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. ... they thought it was the Jordan and that the Promised Land lay on the other side. (p. 12)
(Newly-Christianized blacks' compared their enslavement to that of the Israelites in the Old Testament. They describe the Ohio River as though it were the Jordan River, which separated the Israelites from the Promised Land, the goal of their long trek from Pharaoh's enslavement in Egypt through the wilderness to the land God set aside for them.)
2. They called him Selah.
(The runaway slaves call Dies Drear the Hebrew term which appears in the Bible, at the ends of 71 verses in the Psalms of David and three times in the book of Habakkuk. The word is not completely understood. Some experts think it is a musical direction indicating a pause, repetition, musical interlude, or ritual bow; others translate it as "forever," a blessing.)
3. Above the top floor was a mansard roof with dormer windows. ... (p. 34)
(A mansard roof has two slopes on each of the four sides, the lower portion steeper than the upper. Set in the lower slope are projecting casement windows.)
4. He drew a line to mark the hypotenuse (p. 111)
(The side opposite the ninety-degree angle in a right triangle.)
5. It's also known as a S1. George's cross. ... (p. 115)
(The legendary St. George freed the daughter of Libya's king from a dragon that demanded daily

rations of human flesh. St. George charmed the beast with the sign of the cross before killing it)

6. ... the sighing couldn't have been anything more than his bellows working. (p. 124)
(A great wind-making device with folded sides that expand and contract like lungs as the mechanism is compressed and released. The resulting stream of air fans the blacksmith's fire, increasing its temperature.)
7. ... beautifully crafted totem poles. (pp. 186-187)
(Carved and painted posts which illustrate in fanciful bestial symbols a ritual relationship between Indian clans and animals or other aspects of nature.)
8. It was like a prism (p. 187)
(A solid glass or crystalline object with parallel sides which refracts light, bending it in such a way as to separate it into a rainbow-like display of the colors of the spectrum.)
9. The day by day barter of black people (p. 190)
(Dies Drear's yellowed ledger describes the daily commerce by which slaves were bought, sold, or traded.)
10. He had phosphorous tape over his eyebrows and around his eyes. (p. 246)
(A luminescent tape which becomes yellow when exposed to light and continues to give off rays as it is slowly oxidized. The ghostly glow accentuates the actor's facial structure, making him appear more spectral.)

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. What lifestyle is Thomas leaving behind in North Carolina?
(Life at Great-grandmother Jeffers's house was comfortable to Thomas. He lived in the mountains of North Carolina where he was surrounded by relatives, but had few children to play with. Yet, he was not lonely. He occupied his time whittling figurines and helping Great-grandmother Jeffers with small chores, such as covering the wooden gate with a new coat of blue paint each spring. He enjoyed the forest, where he sometimes lay sheltered from

approaching rainstorms under heavy pine branches. The smoky hills and sweet-smelling pine needles gave Thomas a feeling of security.)

2. Describe Mayhew Skinner's disguise on the night of the ambush.
(Mayhew lies on his stomach in the underbrush until the arrival of the Darrows. He is "dressed in a heavy, odd-fitting, old-fashioned suit." His head is covered by a "long blondish wig streaked with white, which fell to his shoulders." His hat covers the lurid gleam of phosphorous spray paint. On his face and neck is a "cream-colored mask, fitting over his skull under the wig." This disguise, enhanced by his crazed laughter, convinces the Darrows that the ghost of Dies Drear is at hand.)
3. What are the stipulations of Dies Drear's will?
(Mayhew Skinner hands Walter Small the handwritten paper that was hidden in an old ledger. He notes that Dies Drear must have had a premonition of death, for he "willed this cavern and whatever was found in it to the first son of slaves that was able to find it." Since Henry Skinner, the descendent of the "third slave," rediscovered his past and located the treasure after thirty years' time, he feels entitled to the contents of the hidden chamber.)
4. How does Thomas locate the button on the oak door?
(Thomas is suspicious when Billy and Buster cry and shriek when placed near the oak front door of the house of Dies Drear. He examines the quatrefoil design carved in the frame and locates a single petal "on a line with the door-knob," which has a "tiny, wood button in its center." He tests his hypothesis by leading each child to the button. Their negative reaction confirms his suspicion. He feels a stream of cold air issuing from around the button. When he pushes it, the twins "fell into tantrums unlike anything Thomas had ever seen.")
5. Describe Walter Thomas's new office.
(The tower office with its ivy-covered windows is located in the left turret of the main building at the college. Mr. Small unlocks the door with a skeleton key and comments that there is no heat. Cool and moist, the structure looks like a "watchtower, with garret windows and a musty smell." Within are piles of books, bookcases, an

ancient desk, typing table and typewriter, and a hint of cigar smoke. From the narrow window, there is a view of farms on the other side of town.)

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Why does Walter Small emphasize the importance of the Negro church?
(As Mr. Small tries to educate Thomas about the plight of runaway slaves and the value of the Underground Railroad, he stresses the role of the African church. In his words, "I can yield to its separateness when I realize that without it segregated, there would be no story of the Underground Railroad." He explains that runaway slaves found safety in the anonymity of an all-black church, where no bounty hunter could identify them.)
7. Why does the ambush please Mayhew?
(During their conversation while Mayhew walks Thomas to the house, Mayhew indicates that he is "glad we did what we did tonight." Not only have they frightened the Darrows, but the incident has brought him closer to his father. Thomas, warmed by their developing friendship, asks if Mayhew disliked Henry Skinner. Mayhew replies, "It's hard for a boy growing up without his father, not even able to wish for him since he didn't like him to begin with.")
8. Why does Mayhew think Henry Skinner has become like Dies Drear?
(Mayhew is provoked with his father when he learns about the cave and realizes how firmly his father has held on to the treasure. Henry, in defense of his secret, declares, "It wasn't mine to touch, it wasn't mine!" Mayhew's humorless laugh reveals his bitterness. He blames his father for becoming as eccentric as Dies Drear. He reasons that Dies Drear stored up the treasure "to save for slaves a portion of "life which had been denied them." Henry, instead of utilizing the wealth, has bound himself as a slave to the treasure, "simply because a troublemaker called Dies Drear says you are.")

Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. What does Thomas learn from his experience with the house of Dies Drear?
(Thomas, who has just entered his teens, has known periods of frustration with his father, whose values he doesn't understand. Walter

Small's devotion to history and his patience with racial discrimination are puzzling to Thomas. After their experience in the new community and the harrowing night in the cave, Thomas comes to appreciate his father's point of view. As Walter Small immerses himself in the cataloguing of the treasure, Thomas gently covers his shoulders with Mr. Pluto's brown throw, murmuring, "You caught yourself a cold. ... You'd better take care." He locates a black trunk at the end of a chain in the ceiling, but decides not to press the matter. The urgency that has driven him to understand the mystery of the old house has been replaced by a sense of security.)

10. How does Virginia Hamilton illuminate the courage and intelligence of runaway slaves? (Even though the occupants of the "warren of tunnels and hiding places are long since" dead, the author puts life into the history of the house of Dies Drear through the words of Mr. Pluto. The old caretaker, by dedicating himself to the preservation of Dies Drear's treasure and passing on his knowledge of how slaves traveled by the Underground Railroad, impresses both Thomas and his own son with the courage and intelligence of illiterate runaways who had only the triangles, the stars, and moss on the north side to guide them.)

Question 11 Creative Level

11. Organize a public reading of anti-slavery letters, speeches, essays, songs, articles, poems, and novels. Refer to the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Banneker, Phyllis Wheatley, William Lloyd Garrison, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Stephen Vincent Benet, and Lucretia Matt, as well as material from the Liberator, an abolitionist journal.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Refer to books on nineteenth century antiques and list some objects that might have been found among Dies Drear's treasures, such as phials, cut-glass decanters, sabers, ivory combs, inlaid boxes, lacquer ware, scissors cases, andirons, oriental carpets, and filigree jewelry.
2. Make an oral report on Harriet Tubman, who went by the nickname "Moses" during her

daring escapades for the Underground Railroad.'

3. Find on a map the geographical locations mentioned in the story, including the Ohio River, the route of the Underground Railroad from Ohio to Canada, the Blue Ridge Mountain Highway, Pisgah National Forest, the City of Columbus, and Miami Valley. Mark the location of Yellow Springs, Ohio, and Antioch College, the home and alma mater of Virginia Hamilton.
4. Draw a diagram that explains the nature and purpose of the metal triangles, which Dies Drear used to guide conductors on the Underground Railroad.'
5. Explain the meaning of Mohegan and Tuscarora in the story.
6. Make a mural which exemplifies the work of a blacksmith. Include drawings of a forge, hammer, anvil, bellows, smithy tools, animals being shod, and wagons and implements being repaired. Feature devices that the blacksmith fashioned for customers, such as fancy weather vanes, wrought iron gates and decorations, signposts, door and window fasteners, fireplace tools, and boot jacks and scrapers.
7. Analyze the lyrics of "Go Down, Moses" and other Negro spirituals which refer to the enslavement of the Israelites. Refer to the book of Exodus in the Bible for more information.
8. Visit a costume shop or theater and learn how actors make themselves look older by powdering their hair, drawing lines and shadows on their faces, padding their bodies, and applying rubber cement to their skin. Make an oral report to the class on your findings.
9. Write a letter from Thomas to his great-Grandmother Jeffers. Include details of the family's adventures during their first three days in Ohio.
10. Write a detailed explanation of Mr. Pluto's name, including information about the ancient concept of the Underworld, the Elysian Fields, reincarnation, Cerberus, Persephone or Proserpina, Charon, Tantalus, Ixion, Sisyphus, and Lethe and the other three rivers.

Vocabulary Test

Match the bold-faced words in each of the sentences below with synonyms from the list that follows. Place your answers in the blanks at left.

- _____ 1. Interspersed among these were carved and painted wood chests.
- _____ 2. But Pluto was staring into some neutral space above the table, as if waiting agreeably for what was to come next.
- _____ 3. They kicked their legs and flailed their arms wildly.
- _____ 4. Shouldn't we just call the police on them, have the law reprimand them good, and leave it at that?
- _____ 5. She believed roasting chicory was the best power to ward off calamity.
- _____ 6. All old houses have ghost legends, and they are all poppycock!
- _____ 7. No longer were they catercornered on either side of the couch, familiar, as they had been at home.
- _____ 8. Thomas was still wary, so the boys refused to sit just yet.
- _____ 9. He slithered on the wet ground and pounded his fists silently.
- _____ 10. The impact jarred him from head to foot.
- _____ 11. Mr. Small and old Pluto silently surveyed one another.
- _____ 12. We lived with a legacy we weren't aware we had.
- _____ 13. And I have to hobble him so he won't burst his heart-with running.
- _____ 14. One of the ladies in the front row stared at Pluto with sheer malice.
- _____ 15. The dark and silent house looming over them had already reached out for them and was pulling them in.

- A. beat
- B. cautious
- C. crosswise
- D. disaster
- E. examined
- F. force
- G. glided
- H. hamper
- I. hatred
- J. indefinite
- K. inheritance
- L. mixed
- M. nonsense
- N. threatening
- O. upbraid

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Fill-In (30 points)

Name the character who makes each of the following statements. Place your answers in the blanks provided at left.

- _____ 1. No telling what fool thought took hold of your papa to leave these hills to go live in some craven house.
- _____ 2. You will get to know everyone—we are a small community here.
- _____ 3. She can do more with a wild animal than any small child should be able to do with anything!
- _____ 4. I had this dream ... Mr. Pluto was in it, but I didn't know it was him until just now!
- _____ 5. I have a few locks I can give you at a good price.
- _____ 6. I didn't give you permission to read that report.
- _____ 7. My Daddy calls her Sarah, and Mama calls her Sooky.
- _____ 8. What is heaven's name do you think you are doing inside that wall!
- _____ 9. I'm not going to any hospital. ...You can't make me go!
- _____ 10. I pounded it down and carried its chunks and bits away by the bushel basket.
- _____ 11. Here we have the last will and testament of Dies Drear. ...
- _____ 12. I'm going to have Pesty tell them we let all the Carr boys watch!
- _____ 13. Always colored churches! Always white churches somewhere hidden! Why is it folks never get together?
- _____ 14. Over my head, I hear music in the air
Up above my head, I see trouble in the air.
- _____ 15. You think you are the only boy in all these parts that can paint my gate?

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose an answer to complete each of the following statements. Place the letter for your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Walter Thomas gives his son (a) the mechanism that controls the cavern door (b) a history lesson about the tower which houses his office (c) his choice of rooms on the third floor of the new house (d) a leather-bound volume about the Civil War for his birthday.
- _____ 2. When Thomas puts his hand over the button on the front door, (a) the hall mirror slides to one side (b) he feels a stream of cold air (c) panels open on each side of the kitchen door (d) he hears a sound of "Aaaaah, Aaaaah."
- _____ 3. The town druggist suggests a place where Mr. Small (a) may find a locksmith (b) may learn more about Elijah Anderson (c) can go for help (d) can hide from the Darrow family.
- _____ 4. After Pesty leads Mr. Pluto to the church pew, (a) she takes her place in the middle of the choir (b) Mac Darrow begins playing "May the Lord watch between me and thee" (c) ladies in the congregation kneel in the aisle (d) one of the Darrows yells, "Go to the rock!"
- _____ 5. Walter Small warns his son that (a) Ohio people don't like Methodists (b) the family's furniture will not arrive for several days (c) Mr. Pluto walks as agile as a cat (d) polishing Dies Drear's glassware is a useless job.
- _____ 6. When Mr. Pluto realizes that someone is walking on his house, (a) he pulls a rope and causes the wall to collapse (b) Thomas screams, "Devvvil!" (c) Mayhew rides away on the black horse (d) Mr. Small searches the passageway for the missing flashlight.
- _____ 7. Runaway slaves could depend on small facts, such as (a) four triangles form the cross of St. George (b) the Ohio River leads to Canada (c) abolitionists hunt runaways only at night (d) moss grows on the north side.
- _____ 8. The tunnel behind the hall mirror (a) runs under the kitchen and down to the cavern (b) is always dry (c) leads to the Carr property (d) was dug when the Darrows tore down the house and rebuilt it.
- _____ 9. River Swift was at one time (a) Mr. Pluto's companion (b) owner of Dies Drear's property (c) a run-

away slave himself (d) a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

- _____ 10. Martha Small suggests that Mayhew (a) take Mr. Pluto to a hospital until the ambush is complete (b) might like the drama department at the college (c) is the real heir to Dies Drear's treasure (d) is the culprit who poured flour over the kitchen floor.

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- _____ 1. In spite of his superstition and fear, River Swift Darrow hunts for Dies Drear's treasure.
_____ 2. The triangle in Mr. Small's office matches the three triangles found in his house.
_____ 3. Pesty falls asleep and misses the fun of Mayhew's deception of the Darrows.
_____ 4. Thomas is surprised to find Mac Darrow playing the piano for the congregation at Rev. Breckenridge's church.
_____ 5. Mr. Pluto is a descendent of the third slave, who escaped the bounty hunters.
_____ 6. During the ambush, Martha Small stands near the cavern door with a baseball bat in hand.
_____ 7. A real estate developer sends Mr. and Mrs. Small the plans for their new house.
_____ 8. Thomas misses the many children with whom he played at Great-grandmother Jeffers's house.
_____ 9. Thomas does not have to go to school because he arrives in Ohio during Easter vacation.
_____ 10. Walter Small works hard at the forge to make a new lock for the cavern door.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Describe Thomas's emotions as his family moves to the house of Dies Drear.
2. Explain why community members fear and distrust Mr. Pluto.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (40 points)

Match the following character descriptions with names from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank at left.

- _____ 1. sleeps in the parlor beside Thomas's baseball bat.
- _____ 2. anticipates getting a part in a road company within the month.
- _____ 3. cry when a stream of cold air hits them.
- _____ 4. dreams of fastening stilts to his legs and running.
- _____ 5.. always carries a thin flashlight.
- _____ 6. locates a metal peg on the metal triangle.
- _____ 7. claims that his father was a Mohegan.
- _____ 8. peels a mask, false beard, and wig off his head.
- _____ 9. invites Pesty to ride in the buggy.
- _____ 10. enter the house of Dies Drear through a tunnel behind the hall mirror.
- _____ 11. arranges the furniture in the new house.
- _____ 12. gives Thomas a leather-bound volume about the Civil War.
- _____ 13. believes the North is a place of sorrow.
- _____ 14. welcomes Thomas and Walter Small after the church service.
- _____ 15. tells Mr. Small how River Swift Darrow and his family moved a house and then put it back in the original place.
- _____ 16. hobbles the black horse to keep him from running himself to death.
- _____ 17. was a wealthy eccentric from New England.
- _____ 18. explains the identity of Sarah, Sooky, and Little Miss Bee.
- _____ 19. Wilbur, Russell, and River Ross.
- _____ 20. offers Thomas black coffee on his birthday.

- A. Billy and Buster
- B. Carr
- C. the Darrows
- D. Dies Drear
- E. Great-grandmother Jeffers
- F. Mac Darrow
- G. Martha Small
- H. Mayhew Skinner
- I. Mr. Pluto
- J. Rev. Breckenridge
- K. River Swift Darrow
- L. Thomas Small
- M. Walter Small

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. By what name did slaves call Dies Drear?
- _____ 2. Who was murdered a week after two slaves were killed by bounty hunters?
- _____ 3. Who was also known as Hades, the Lord of the Underworld?
- _____ 4. Where does Pesty sit when she arrives at church?
- _____ 5. What are the limestone projections that hang from the cave roof?
- _____ 6. Whose job is it to polish glass bottles on the ledges of the cave?
- _____ 7. Who plans to catalogue the contents of Dies Drear's treasure?
- _____ 8. What does Thomas break when he bursts into the kitchen?

- _____ 9. How many triangles does Mr. Small find in the house?
_____ 10. What does Thomas drop in the tunnel under the front door?
_____ 11. Where does Thomas sleep on his first night at the house?
_____ 12. Where could slaves safely hide while on the road?
_____ 13. What color did Mr. Pluto paint the dirt wall?
_____ 14. Who flutters the wings on the black horse's sides?
_____ 15. For what craft does Thomas have real talent?

Part III: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Explain why Mr. Pluto believes he has a valid claim to Dies Drear's treasure.
2. Describe how runaway slaves are guided by the triangles.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. L | 6. M | 11. E |
| 2. J | 7. C | 12. K |
| 3. A | 8. B | 13. H |
| 4. O | 9. G | 14. I |
| 5. D | 10. F | 15. N |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Fill-In (30 points)

1. Great-grandmother Jeffers
2. Rev. Breckenridge
3. Mr. Pluto (Henry Skinner)
4. Thomas
5. Carr
6. Walter Small
7. M. C. "Mac" Darrow
8. Martha Small
9. Mr. Pluto (Henry Skinner)
10. Mr. Pluto (Henry Skinner)
11. Mayhew Skinner
12. Mayhew Skinner
13. Thomas
14. Pesty
15. Great-grandmother Jeffers

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

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

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (40 points)

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. L | 11. I | 16. I |
| 2. H | 7. K | 12. M | 17. D |
| 3. A | 8. H | 13. E | 18. F |
| 4. L | 9. I | 14. J | 19. C |
| 5. L | 10. C | 15. B | 20. G |

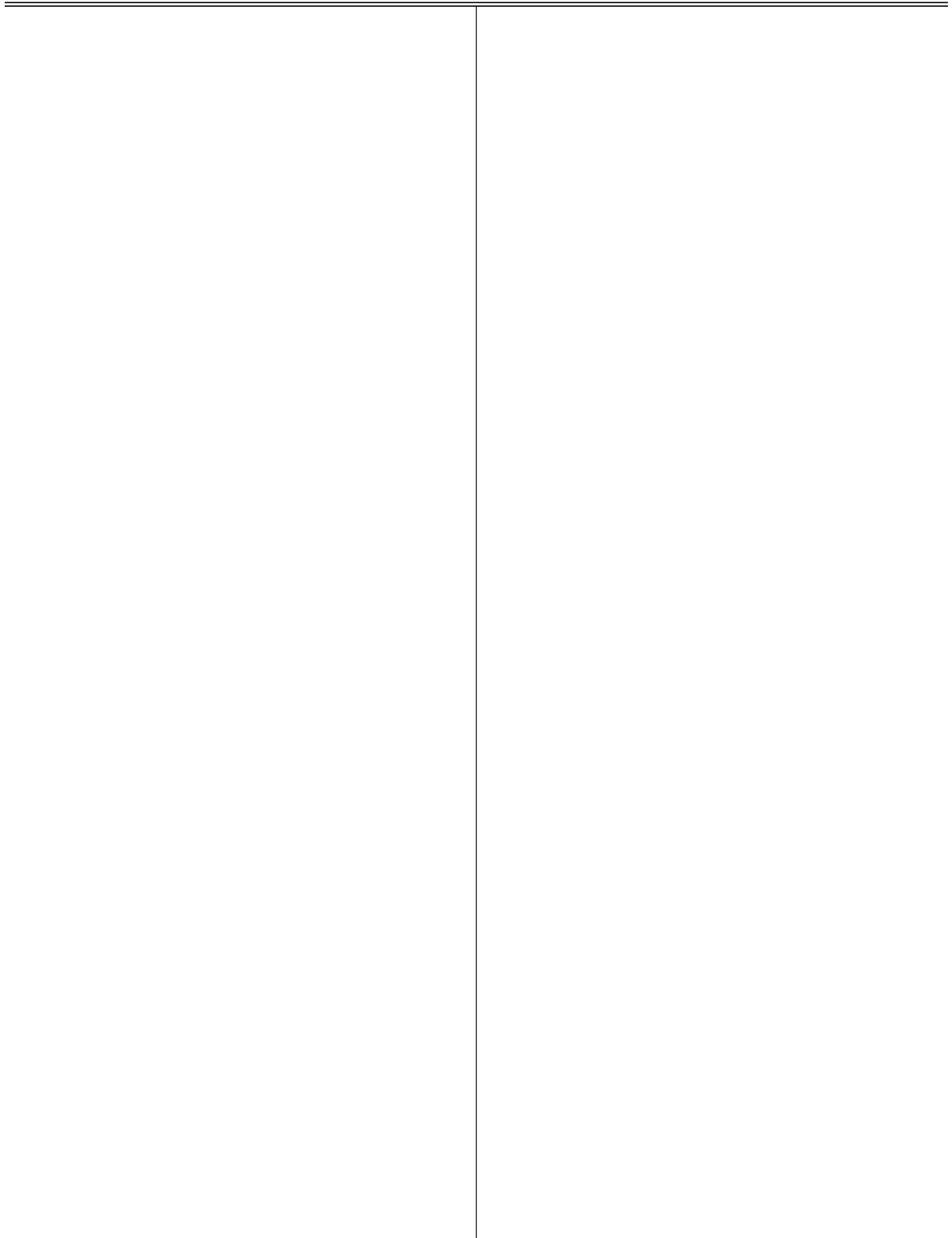
Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

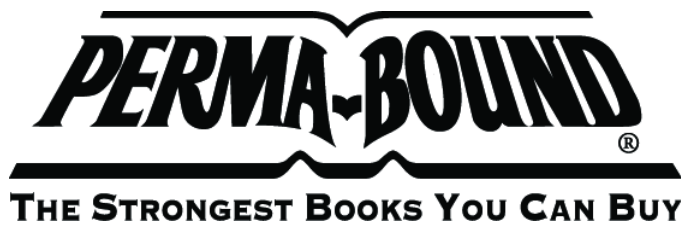
1. Selah

2. Dies Drear
3. Pluto
4. with the choir
5. stalactites
6. Pesty
7. Walter Small
8. lock
9. three
10. flashlight
11. front parlor
12. Negro church
13. white
14. Pesty
15. wood carving

Part III: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.





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