

How To Eat Fried Worms

Thomas Rockwell

Teacher's Guide
Written By Kathy Sammis

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

Friends Billy and Alan make a bet one summer day: If Billy eats one earthworm each day for fifteen days in a row, Alan will pay Billy fifty dollars. Alan is motivated by his love of arguing, and Billy is motivated by his desire to buy a used minibike.

Chapter 2

Alan, his helper Joe, and Billy's helper Tom dig up worms in the orchard. Alan selects a huge night crawler. He and Joe insist that the worms must be big enough so Billy has to cut them into bites and eat them with a fork.

Chapters 3 and 4

Billy is disgusted and repelled when Alan presents him with the boiled night crawler. But, urged on by Tom, he slathers the worm with a variety of condiments and consumes every bit of worm. Then he squawks and hops like a chicken, thoroughly alarming Alan and Joe, who run away.

Chapter 5

Alan worries about losing his fifty dollars; after all, he knows how stubborn Billy is. Joe promises he'll think of ways to make Billy quit.

Chapter 6

Billy reluctantly eats the second worm.

Chapters 7 and 8

Tom helps Billy by rolling the next worms in corn-

meal and frying them, and by urging Billy to think of the worms as fish when he's consuming them.

Chapters 9 and 10

Joe tells Billy an elaborate tale of how his father and his mother became extremely alarmed when they heard about the boys eating worms—so alarmed that his mother collapsed. But, says Joe, none of the adults would tell him what exactly eating worms does to you. Billy is scared witless, but Tom sees that Joe and Alan are giggling uncontrollably as the tale proceeds.

Chapters 11 and 12

Tom assures Billy that Joe is fibbing, that eating worms is harmless. So Billy demands that Tom also eat a worm; Tom bolts. Billy forces himself to eat the fifth worm anyway.

Chapter 13

Alan can't sleep for worrying about the fifty dollars he's going to owe Billy. Joe assures him that he'll get Billy to crack.

Chapters 14 and 15

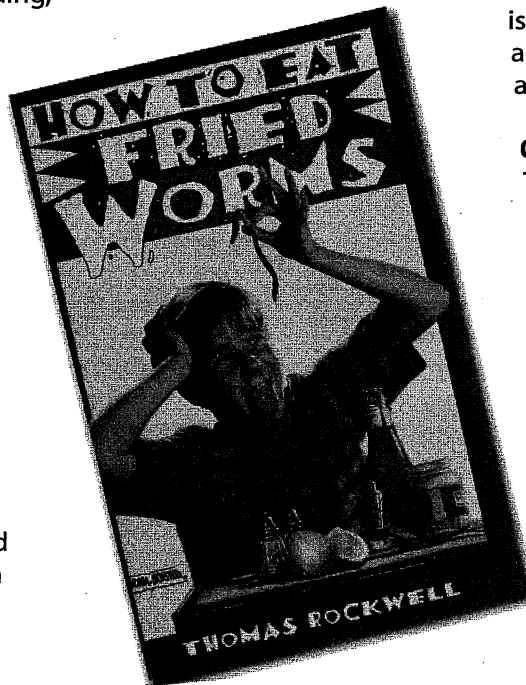
That same night, Billy has nightmares about worms. He's still worrying about Joe's warning, so he develops stomach problems. He wakes his parents and tells them that he's been eating worms. Billy's mother is greatly alarmed; his father isn't, and a call to Poison Control yields the news that eating night crawlers has no short- or long-term ill effects.

Chapters 16, 17, and 18

Billy serenely eats worms six, seven, and eight.

Chapter 19

Alan and Joe present Billy with a worm that's over two feet long! Billy protests, then suspects. He scrapes away the cornmeal coating and discovers that Joe and Alan have glued two night crawlers



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together. The boys argue and yell at each other heatedly about cheating.

Chapter 20

Alan and Joe ask Billy's mother to monitor Billy's worm-eating for two days while they're away.

Chapters 21 and 22

Billy's mother creatively cooks the next two worms, and Billy loves the tasty results.

Chapter 23

Joe hatches a new plot: he and Alan will take Billy to Shea Stadium for a baseball game and fill him with food and drink. Billy will be asleep by the time Alan's father drives him home and won't remember about eating the thirteenth worm.

Chapter 24

Billy makes a toasted-cheese-and-worm sandwich and consumes his twelfth worm.

Chapters 25 and 26

As planned, Alan's dad carries a sleeping Billy into his house. But Billy wakes up at a quarter to midnight, remembers the worm, rushes outside, rouses Tom and Tom's brother Pete, and finds a worm.

Chapters 27 and 28

Billy, Tom, and Pete station themselves outside Alan's and Joe's houses. Pete cranks up his shrill siren, waking the entire neighborhood, while Billy gulps down the thirteenth worm as Alan and Joe watch out of their bedroom windows. The next day, Alan's and Joe's parents order them to go door to door through the neighborhood apologizing for the middle-of-the-night disturbance.

Chapters 29 and 30

The four boys get into a heated verbal argument that escalates into physical violence. Afterward, their fathers insist that they work things out. Joe tells Alan several times that they have to give up and that Billy has won. Alan responds, "Yeah, but—" and Joe doesn't let him finish.

Chapter 31

A letter addressed to Billy's mother arrives, ostensibly from the family doctor, detailing the dreadful effects of eating worms. The letter features any number of misspellings and typos.

Chapters 32 and 33

Once again, Billy is petrified, but his father comes home and reassures him that Alan and Joe concocted the "doctor's" letter. Billy happily eats his peanut-butter-and-fried-worm sandwich, the fourteenth worm.

Chapters 34 and 35

Billy eats the steaming, Southern-fried worm prepared by Alan and Joe. But then he starts burping beans and realizes the "worm" was a fake.

Chapter 36

Billy finds a worm, but as he prepares to eat it, Alan and Joe tackle him and lock him in the barn's tool closet. Then they prepare to lower Billy into the cistern and keep him there until the next day so he can't eat the fifteenth worm.

Chapters 37 and 38

Drawn by the yells from the barn, Billy's father arrives, orders Alan and Joe to go home, and sends Billy to his room, the fifteenth worm not finished.

Chapters 39 and 40

Tom and Pete arrive and send a worm up to Billy through his bedroom window. As Alan and Joe watch from the yard, Billy chomps his way through one last night crawler, the fifteenth worm. Billy has won the bet!

Epilogue

Billy rides his minibike to the riverbank, where he joins Tom and Joe for a picnic lunch. Billy has made himself a worm-and-egg on rye sandwich. It seems he's acquired a taste for worms and just can't stop eating them.

Timeline

- Day 1** Billy and Alan make their bet; Billy eats the first worm, a night crawler.
- Days 2 & 3** Billy eats the second and third worms.
- Day 4** Billy eats the fourth worm, while Joe tells a tale about his parents being deathly afraid of the effects of boys eating worms.
- Day 5** Billy eats the fifth worm; that night, he feels sick; Poison Control assures Billy's father that eating a worm is harmless.
- Days 6, 7, 8** Billy nonchalantly eats three more

- worms; Alan worries a lot about losing his fifty dollars.
- Day 9** Joe and Alan glue two night crawlers together, but Billy discovers their ruse.
- Days 10 & 11** Billy's mother creatively cooks the worms for Billy while Alan and Joe are away.
- Day 12** Billy cooks himself a toasted-cheese-and-worm sandwich.
- Day 13** Billy foils Joe's and Alan's plot to make him forget today's worm via a trip to Shea Stadium; just before midnight, Billy eats a worm in front of Joe's and Alan's homes.
- Day 14** Billy, Tom, Joe, and Alan get into a furious physical fight; Billy eats the fourteenth worm after his father assures him a letter from the family doctor warning that worms are deadly is a hoax.
- Day 15** Alan and Joe fight Billy; Billy's father sends him to his room without a worm; Tom throws Billy a worm—he eats it and wins the bet.
- Epilogue** Billy has bought the minibike, and he's still eating worms.

Author Sketch

Thomas Rockwell was born in 1933 in New Rochelle, New York, the son of renowned artist Norman Rockwell. He grew up with his parents and two brothers in rural Vermont. His mother filled the house with books and often read aloud to the boys; Thomas was an avid reader from a young age. He earned a B.A. in literature from Bard College in 1956 and married fellow student and artist Gail Sudler in 1955. The couple had two children, Barnaby and Abigail. The Rockwells moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, where Thomas helped his father write his autobiography, and where the Rockwell family lived for many years.

Reading to his young son revived Rockwell's interest in children's literature. After one book of verse that got mixed reviews, he turned to novels, where his delight in the outrageous and the irreverent brought him success among young readers.

Critic's Corner

Rockwell is best known for his ability to create funny stories with imaginative plots and an irreverent tone that appeal strongly to children, along with sometimes crude humor and subjects that annoy adults but delight preteen readers. He has also written novels that focus on more serious topics, like a parent's remarriage. *How to Eat Fried Worms* is by far Rockwell's most popular book, and it has won numerous awards voted for by children in many states. Child readers delighted in the novel's disgusting premise—and descriptions—of eating worms, and in the authentic, squabbling, ten-year-old protagonists. Critics also admired the book. *Booklist* called it "a hilarious story that will revolt and delight bumptious, unreachable intermediate-grade boys and any other less particular mortals." *Kirkus Reviews* wrote, "Rockwell's sensibilities (if that's the word) are so uncannily close to those of the average ten-year-old boy that one begins to admire Billy as a really sharp operator." *Childhood Education* added, "These four boys have to be among the most lively and believable in recent fiction." A movie version of *How to Eat Fried Worms* is due for release in the later part of 2006.

Works by Thomas Rockwell

- Rackety-Bang and Other Verses* (1969)
- Normal Rockwell's Hometown* (1970)
- Humpfl!* (1971)
- Squawwwwk!* (1972)
- The Neon Motorcycle* (1973)
- How to Eat Fried Worms* (1973)
- Hiding Out* (1974)
- The Portmanteau Book* (1974)
- Tin Cans* (1975)
- The Thief* (1977)
- Norman Rockwell: My Adventures as an Illustrator* (with Norman Rockwell) (1979)
- How to Eat Fried Worms and Other Plays* (1992)
- Hey, Lover Boy* (1981)
- Oatmeal Is Not for Mustaches* (1984)
- How to Fight a Girl* (1987)
- The Best of Norman Rockwell* (1988)
- How to Eat Fried Worms: Literature Unit* (1988)
- How to Get Fabulously Rich* (1990)

Bibliography

- Booklist*, November 15, 1973, p. 342
Childhood Education, March 1974, p. 294
Children's Literature Review, Vol. 6. Detroit: Gale Research, 1984
Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series, Vol. 44. Detroit: Gale Research 1994
Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Fifth Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators*. NY: H.W. Wilson Co., 1983
Kirkus Reviews, August 15, 1973, p. 883
Library Journal, January 15, 1974, p. 211
Publishers Weekly, June 13, 1998
School Library Journal, August 1980, p. 70
Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators*. Boston/NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1995
Something About the Author, Vols. 7 & 70. Detroit: Gale Research, 1975, 1993

Internet Sites

- Birthday Bios: Thomas Rockwell
www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/brth-page/03mar/3-13rockwell.html
How to Eat Fried Worms (book banning)
everything2.com/index.pl?node=How%20to%20Eat%20Fried%20Worms

General Objectives

1. To discuss the nature of friendship, what can cause conflict among friends, and ways of resolving such conflicts
2. To explore the reasons why people make and accept dares and bets
3. To analyze what might be considered fair and what might be considered cheating in the course of conducting a contest
4. To share ideas with classmates about what foods you and they consider "yucky"

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the strategies that Alan and Joe employ to try to get Billy to lose the bet, and the strategies Billy and his allies use to thwart these schemes
2. To identify the ways in which the boys' parents influence the course of events
3. To track the changing rules of the bet
4. To evaluate the different boys' claims of fairness and cheating

5. To analyze the ways in which Alan and Joe, and Billy and Tom, operate together as two-person teams
6. To understand the meanings of the unusually titled chapters of the novel
7. To identify the various ways in which the worms are cooked, and the foods Billy adds to them, in the course of the fifteen days

Literary Terms and Applications

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

epilogue a concluding section of a book that briefly outlines subsequent events involving the characters, as in the epilogue of this novel where we learn that Billy did in fact buy the minibike—and that he is still eating worms.

irony a set of circumstances or a result that is the opposite of what is or might be expected. After all the initial revulsion at eating worms, it is ironic that Billy has developed an enduring taste for them, as we learn in the epilogue.

metaphor a comparison between two things that are not literally alike. Several of the title chapters are metaphors—the ones referring to World War II, for example, which underscore the fact that the conduct of the bet has become a virtual war between the two teams of boys.

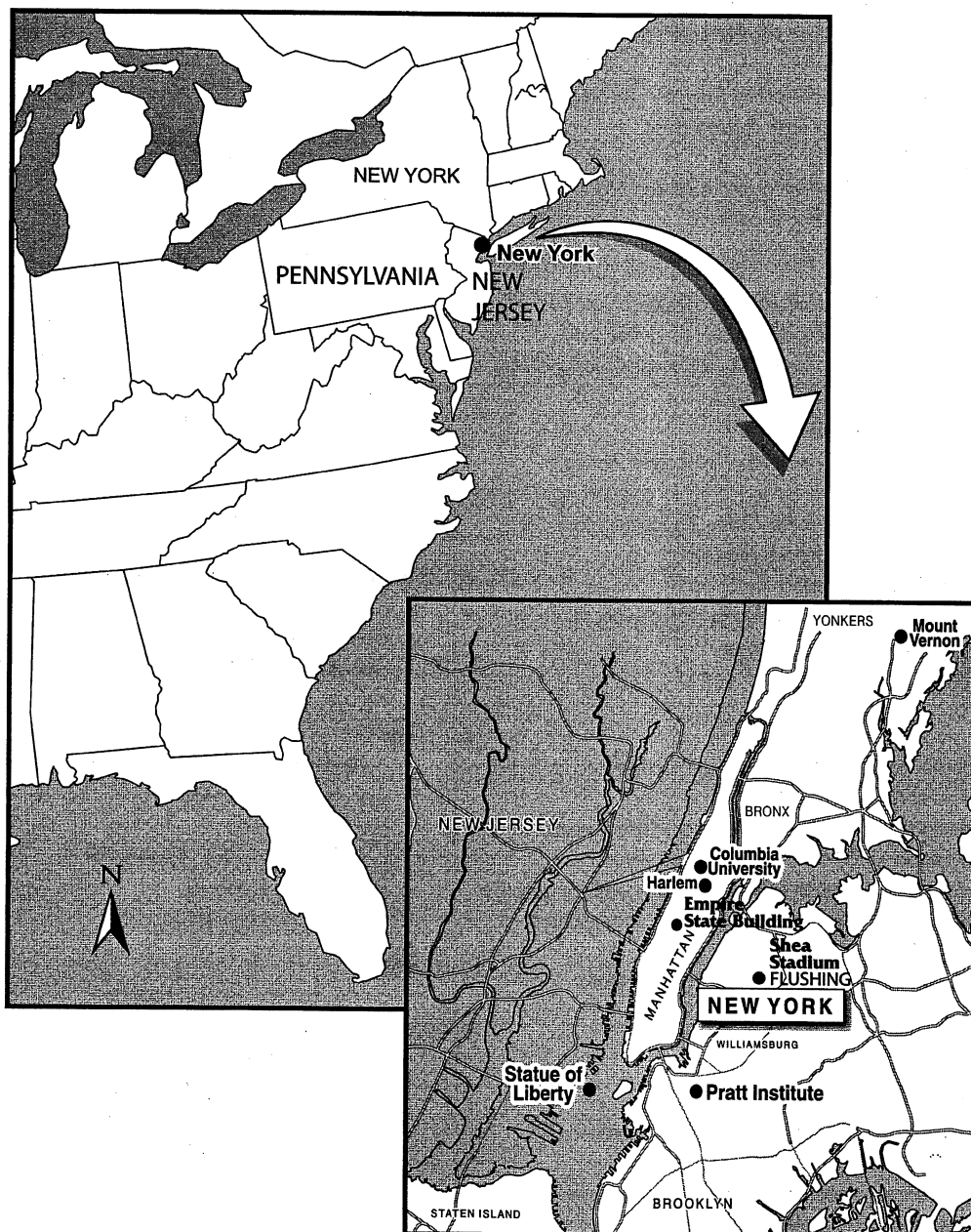
sequel a literary work or film that is complete in itself but continues a story begun in an earlier work or film. Thomas Rockwell wrote two more novels featuring the boys in *Fried Worms*, with Billy as the main character: *How to Fight a Girl* and *How to Get Fabulously Rich*.

The Importance of Setting

The main setting is the barn and barnyard behind Billy's house. Here, Billy eats the first nine worms, Tom bolts rather than eat a worm himself, and Alan and Joe lock Billy in the tool closet and plan to put him in the cistern so he can't eat the fifteenth worm. Several important scenes are set in Billy's house and backyard. Mrs. Forrester and then Billy cook worms creatively in the kitchen, Billy wakes his parents up one night when he's worried sick about eating the worms, and Billy frantically hoists

the worm-in-a-basket provided by Pete up to his bedroom window and then triumphantly eats the fifteenth worm while the rest of the boys and Billy's mom watch from the yard. The boys make the bet in the front yard of Tom's house, and Billy eats the thirteenth worm at night with the siren wailing in front of Alan's and Joe's homes.

While the action occurs primarily in the neighborhood where the boys all live, there are a few references to sights in New York City that set the book in New York State.



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Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Tom Birdseye, *I'm Going to Be Famous*
Judy Blume, *Freckle Juice* and the *Fudge* novels
Beverly Cleary, *Henry Huggins* and sequels
Helen Cresswell, the *Bagthorpe* series
Paula Danziger, *Not for a Billion Gazillion Dollars*
John D. Fitzgerald, *The Great Brain* and sequels
Carl Hiaasen, *Hoot*
Suzy Kline, *Orp and the Chop Suey Burgers*
Kate Klise, *Letters from Camp*
Gary Larson, *There's a Hair in My Dirt! A Worm's Story*
Lois Lowry, *Anastasia Krupnik* and sequels
Hilary McKay, *The Exiles*
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *Beetles, Lightly Toasted*
Gary Paulsen, *Harris and Me: A Summer Remembered*
Jon Scieszka, *Summer Reading Is Killing Me!*
Cynthia Voigt, *Bad, Badder, Baddest*

Nonfiction

Mary Appelhof, *Worms Eat My Garbage: How to Set Up & Maintain a Worm Composting System*
Jolsie Fison and Felicity Dahl, *Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes*
Bianca Lewis, *Compost Critters*
Molly McLaughlin, *Earthworms, Dirt, and Rotten Leaves*
Lucy Monroe, *Creepy Cuisine: Revolting Recipes That Look Disgusting But Taste Divine*
Elaine Pascoe, *Earthworms*
Cheryl Porter, *Gross Grub: Wretched Recipes That Look Yucky But Taste Yummy*
Michael E. Ross, *Wormology*

CD-ROM

Daring Deborah's Icky Slimy Creature Safari
(Electronic Books for Kids)
Jumpstart Adventures: 4th Grade (also 5th Grade and 6th Grade) (Knowledge Adventure)
Reading Blaster: Vocabulary (Knowledge Adventure)
Writer's Workshop I: Middle School Program (Holt, Rinehart, & Winston)
Writing Trek Language Adventures (Sunburst Communications)

Internet

The Adventures of Herman
www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/worms/index.html
Birthday Bios: Thomas Rockwell
www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/brth-page/03mar/3-13rockwell.html

The Burrow
www.jetcompost.com/burrow/
Cheap and Easy Worm Bin!
whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/Easywormbin.htm
Composting with Red Wiggler Worms
www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html
How to Eat Fried Worms—Wormy Recipes
www.walden.com/web/teach/worms/recipes
S. K. Worm Answers Your Questions About Soil and Stuff!
www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/education/squirm/skworm.html
Vermicomposting (Make Good Use of Your Garbage!)
www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/worms.htm
Worms
42explore.com/worms.htm

Video/DVD

All About Soil (Schlessinger Video Prods.)
Bill Nye the Science Guy: Invertebrates (Disney Educational Prods.)
Bugs for Breakfast: Food and Culture (Learning Seed)
Complete Guide to Compost (Light Source Film)
Conflict Resolution: Grades 5-9 (Sunburst Communications)
Student Workshop: Building Character (Sunburst)
Worm Bin Creatures, Alive Through a Microscope
(Warren Hatch Prods.)

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *How to Eat Fried Worms* should include these aspects.

Themes

- friendship, and conflict among friends
- resolving conflicts
- wagering
- fairness and cheating
- eating worms
- parental guidance

Motifs

- recipes and cooking
- condiments
- earthworms
- responding to dares
- daydreams and nightmares
- wanting minibike

Meaning Study

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

1. "Tom can be your second and Joe'll be mine, just like in a duel." (Ch. 1, p. 4)
(A duel is formal combat with weapons fought between two people; each combatant has an aide called a second; the combat is conducted in the presence of witnesses. Alan is saying that the conduct of the bet over fifteen days will be like a duel, with combatants [Alan and Billy] and seconds/witnesses [Joe and Tom].)
2. "Not him," said Tom, pointing to a night crawler. (Ch. 2, p. 7)
(A night crawler is an especially large earthworm that can be found on the ground at night. Tom objects at first because night crawlers are larger than other earthworms, but then he thinks it will be more fun to watch Billy eat the biggest worms possible.)
3. "Hay fever," gasped Alan, "hay fever." (Ch. 10, p. 40)
(Alan and Joe can't stop themselves from laughing while Joe spins his elaborate tale. They try to disguise their laughter as sneezing, and Alan tries to blame the "sneezing" on hay fever, an allergic reaction to pollen that is marked by frequent sneezing.)
4. The frying pan lay upside down beside the horse trough. (Ch. 11, p. 45)
(Billy eats the first nine worms in the barn behind his house. Outside, in the barnyard, is a horse trough, a long, shallow container for horses' drinking water or feed.)
5. Maybe there was an antidote. . . "Poison Control?" (Ch. 15, pp. 53 & 58)
(An antidote is a remedy to counteract the effects of a poison. The gnawing worry created by Joe's tale about his parents' concern is causing Billy to feel sick; he worries that the worms he's eaten have poisoned him, and he wonders if there is an antidote. After Billy wakes up his

parents with his concerns, his father calls Poison Control, a free, public hotline for people to consult when someone has been or may have been exposed in any way to a poisonous substance.)

6. "This is some sort of a ringer." (Ch. 19, pp. 63-64)
(A ringer is someone or something that enters a competition under false pretenses. Billy is complaining that the two-foot-long worm can't actually be qualified to be part of the bet, since there's never been a worm this long. He's right, of course; Alan and Joe have glued together two night crawlers.)
7. "Are you sure I'll be neutral enough? I am his mother." (Ch. 20, p. 71)
(Mrs. Forrester warns Alan and Joe that she might have some bias toward Billy because he's her son. To be neutral, a person must have no bias toward one side or another of an issue or situation.)
8. Shea Stadium (Ch. 23, p. 78)
(Shea Stadium is the home ballpark of the New York Mets Major League baseball team, located in New York City. This is one of the details that sets the novel in New York state.)
9. "Lumbricus coreopsis? Fulmar?" (Ch. 33, p. 102)
(Billy is puzzled about some of the terms in the bogus letter from Dr. McGrath. Alan and Joe got the scientific term for the earthworm right in the letter [page 99]: Lumbricus terrestris. But then they got fanciful: coreopsis is a yellow-flowered herb, and a fulmar is a seabird of colder northern seas.)
10. "Not if we put him down the cistern." (Ch. 36, p. 107)
(A cistern is an underwater tank for storing liquids, especially water. Alan proposes to put Billy down in the barn's cistern until the next day so Billy won't be able to eat the fifteenth worm and win the bet.)

Comprehension Study

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

Literal Level (Questions 1-3)

1. What strategies do Alan and Joe use to try to make Billy lose the bet?

(They begin by choosing night crawlers, the largest earthworms they can find, for Billy to eat, and present them boiled into a brown, steaming mass. Billy can't just gulp these down; he has to cut them up and eat them in pieces. Next, Alan and Joe take to whispering while Billy eats worms. When Billy demands to know what they're whispering about, Joe insists it's nothing and then launches into an elaborate tale of his parents being deathly afraid of the effects of eating worms which, Joe claims, no one will describe for him. Then Alan and Joe glue two night crawlers together into a two-foot-long monster, with the attachment hidden under a cornmeal coating. In their most elaborate scheme, Alan and Joe take Billy to Shea Stadium, ply him with food and drink so he forgets about eating a worm, and make sure he will be sound asleep when Alan's father drives Billy home. Then Alan and Joe write a bogus letter to Billy's mother, supposedly from the family doctor warning of the dire effects of worm eating. For the fifteenth worm, Alan and Joe create a fake worm out of beans. Then they tackle Billy when he tries to eat a real worm, lock him in the barn's tool closet, and prepare to put him in the cistern until the next day.)

2. How do Billy and his friends and family thwart Alan's and Joe's schemes?

(Billy slathers the repugnant night crawlers with condiments of all sorts. Tom coats the worms with cornmeal and fries them, urging Billy to think of fish while eating the worms. As Joe tells his tall tale, Tom points out to Billy that Joe and Alan are giggling uncontrollably. Still worried about Joe's tale, Billy consults his parents; his father speaks with Poison Control, which assures him and Billy that the boy will suffer no nasty consequences from eating a worm a day. Billy is suspicious of the two-foot-long night

crawler and scrapes off the cornmeal coating to discover the truth. After coming home from Shea Stadium, Billy wakes up and finds and eats a worm just before midnight, with the needed witnesses. Billy is horrified by the "doctor's" letter, but has no concerns after his father explains that Alan and Joe wrote it. Billy realizes the last "worm" was a fake when he starts burping beans. Tom and Pete save the day after Billy's dad sends him to his room; they provide a basket with a worm in it that Billy is able to pull up to his room and thus eat the fifteenth worm.)

3. What role do the boys' parents play in the course of the bet?

(Billy's mother invents tasty, creative ways to cook the worms and acts as witness to Billy's worm consumption while Alan and Joe are away. Billy's father speaks to Poison Control and explains that the medical letter is a hoax, relieving Billy's fears each time. Alan's father carries a sleeping Billy into his house just before midnight, although he doesn't know this is part of Alan's scheme against Billy. Alan's father orders Alan and Joe to go door-to-door to apologize to the neighbors for the midnight siren disturbance. After the fistfight, Alan's father and Joe's father order the boys to sit together in a room until they work things out. Billy's father stops Alan and Joe from putting Billy into the cistern, but almost causes Billy to lose the bet at the last minute by ordering him up to his room without a worm.)

Interpretive Level (Questions 4-7)

4. What are the changing rules of the bet? Does everyone agree on these rules?

(The bet starts out with just the rule that Billy must eat one earthworm per day for fifteen days, and he is allowed to use whatever condiments he chooses in whatever amounts he wants. The worms can be cooked any way Billy prefers. Joe and Allen provide the worms, and witnesses must be present to verify that Billy has eaten them. Joe and Alan decide each worm has to be big enough to be cut into bites and eaten with a fork; worms can't be small enough so Billy can just gulp them down without chewing. Billy doesn't like this rule, but he accepts it. Later, Joe and Alan say it's not fair to make soup out of the worms or chop them all up like hash or chicken salad; Billy has to eat the worms

piece by piece. Again, Billy futilely objects. Billy also claims that the tricks Joe and Alan play on him constitute cheating, but the rules of the bet say nothing about tricks being off-limits.)

5. Write a brief character sketch of each boy—Billy, Alan, Joe, and Tom.
(Billy is stubborn, adventurous, and resolute at responding to dares. Alan is argumentative, messy, and nervous—he is constantly gnawing at his thumbnail. Joe is sly, devious, a schemer. Tom is a worrier who takes his troubles very seriously and is also observant about Joe’s scheming.)
6. How do Alan and Joe operate as a team during the course of the bet?
(Joe thinks up schemes to trick Billy into losing the bet, ideas that Alan wouldn’t come up with on his own. When Alan gets nervous about losing his fifty dollars, Joe reassures him by hatching these schemes. Alan goes along and helps to carry out the schemes.)
7. How do Billy and Tom operate as a team during the course of the bet?
(Tom acts as Billy’s support person. He starts cooking the worms in more appetizing ways, and coaches Tom to think of fish when eating the fried worms. He alerts Billy that Joe is telling a tall tale about his parents’ concern about eating worms. However, he fails Billy when he decides it would be more fun to make Billy eat enormous night crawlers and again when he runs away rather than eat a worm alongside Billy to reassure him that it’s a safe thing to do. Tom becomes helpful again when he has his brother bring the siren to Alan and Joe’s houses on the Shea Stadium night. And he saves the day when he gets the fifteenth worm up to Billy in his bedroom to win the bet.)

Critical Level (Questions 8-11)

8. Evaluate the various tricks Alan and Joe play on Billy to try to make him lose the bet. Are these tricks fair? Are they cheating? (The boys argue a lot about this.)
(Students’ answers will vary. Tom argues that it’s not fair to dig worms from the manure pile; even though the rules allow Joe and Alan to choose the worms, it really does seem unfair to choose manure-tainted worms. Billy thinks it’s

unfair to use huge night crawlers, but that falls under the rule of letting Alan and Joe choose the worms. The boys have a heated argument in Chapter 19 about cheating by gluing two worms together, with Joe claiming that it would only have been cheating if Billy had been fooled and eaten the two worms as one. The boys have another argument in Chapter 20 about fairness and cheating when Alan and Joe extend the rule about how the worms can be prepared for eating. In Chapters 29 and 30, Billy and Alan get into a fight about the Shea Stadium scheme as cheating. In Chapter 35, Billy argues about the cheating aspect of the fake worm, and in Chapter 36, Billy yells that it’s cheating to lock him up so he can’t eat the fifteenth worm [this seems clearly to be unfair and to constitute cheating].)

9. What is the meaning of the titles of Chapters 23, 25, and 26?
(They refer to the escalating “war” between the boys over the conduct of the bet. Chapter 23 is the eve of the Shea Stadium assault-by-trickery on Billy planned by Alan and Joe. [Nagumo and Kusaka directed the December 7, 1941, air strikes on Pearl Harbor from the Japanese aircraft carrier fleet north of Hawaii.] Chapter 25 describes the apparently successful carrying out of the planned trickery [the Pearl Harbor assault that followed the plans of December 6]. Chapter 26 describes Billy and Tom’s successful counterassault in response [likened to the successful U.S. counterassault against the Japanese on Guadalcanal].
10. What does the title of Chapter 39 refer to? Why is the title of Chapter 30 partly upside down?
(In Chapter 39, Tom comes to the rescue at the last minute, just as the U.S. Cavalry often rides to the rescue at the last minute in old Western movies. In Chapter 30, Joe and Alan supposedly agree to give up their trickery, that Billy has won—the “peace treaty.” But Joe and Alan have more schemes up their sleeves, so the upside-down letters indicate the insincerity of this “treaty.”)

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11. In your opinion, what do the illustrations add to the novel?

(Students' answers will vary. The illustrations show the boys as lively, expressive individuals.)

Creative Level (Questions 12-13)

12. Write a letter to Joe's and Alan's parents purportedly by police/FBI saying they are launching an investigation into an illegal betting scheme. The letter is really written by Billy to scare Joe and Alan, like the fake doctor letter that Joe and Alan wrote to scare Billy.
13. Write the dialogue between Joe and Alan as they are cooking up one of their schemes to trick Billy.

Across the Curriculum

Science and Health

1. Create a multimedia report on earthworms, including night crawlers. Be sure to include a visual that shows the size of night crawlers in relation to other earthworms and to some common objects, like a ruler or a pencil.
2. Billy's mother worries that his stomach upset may be caused by tapeworms. Explain what tapeworms are, how they affect the digestive system, and how to eliminate them from that system.
3. Explain the legitimate medical terms in the fake letter from Dr. McGrath on pages 99-100 of the novel, and identify the incorrect medical terms also.
4. Draw up a nutritional evaluation of worms as human food. Would they be harmful as a food? Would they be nutritionally beneficial? neutral?
5. Billy specifically excludes tomato hornworms from the types of worms he has to eat during the bet. Why do you think this is? Find some pictures of tomato hornworms, show them in relation to some common objects, display your findings to classmates, and then explain why Billy would insist on these creatures being off-limits for the eating contest.

6. Explain how worry and stress can cause a sick feeling in your stomach.

Language Arts

1. Reread the poem about fish on page 28 of the novel. Then write a poem on that model featuring other types of creatures, such as insects, birds, pets, or mammals.
2. Keep a journal describing your dreams, including nightmares and daydreams. Try to link each dream with events or emotions you are experiencing that may have triggered each dream.
3. Billy and Alan speak in fractured English during the first worm challenge, on pages 13 through 21 of the novel. Rewrite these fractured lines of dialogue into normal English.
4. Where in the United States do Billy and his friends live? The novel gives a few clues. Find those clues and decide where the novel is set.
5. Tom tells Billy's mother, "It's my cousin who's named Columbus. Columbus, Ohio. He's a capital fellow." This is a pun. Explain this, and then write some puns of your own.
6. The bogus letter from "Dr. McGrath" to Billy's mother on pages 99-100 of the novel has lots of errors! Rewrite the letter correcting the spelling, typing, and other composition errors.

Mathematics

1. Conduct a poll among classmates (and other students in your school if you choose) to rate the top ten yuckiest foods they are faced with eating (say, in the school cafeteria or at home). Graph the results of your poll.
2. Do you have a savings account? If so, what is the interest rate that your saved money is earning? Now, choose something that you want to buy that you have to save up for. Decide when you want to buy the item and how much money you will need to buy it. Then develop a plan on how to earn the money and how to earn it over the period of time you have chosen.

3. Billy competed to earn \$50, and he used it to buy a used minibike. This novel was first published in 1973. What would \$50 be worth today? After you have calculated that figure, choose what you would buy if you won that adjusted amount of money.

Art

1. Create a diagram of an earthworm showing its external and internal structures.
2. Design a poster showing different types of worms. Include basic information about each worm next to its image.
3. Create a single artwork that depicts each of the fish mentioned in Tom's poem on page 28 of the novel.

Social Issues

1. Billy and his friends have many arguments about what's fair and what's cheating as the bet plays out. Discuss with classmates what types of behavior might be "cheating" and "fair" and under what circumstances.
2. *How to Eat Fried Worms* has been challenged very often by people who want to ban it from school libraries and school reading lists. Why do you think this might be so? Would you agree with the banning arguments?
3. With classmates, discuss conflict resolution techniques that might help Billy and his friends with the problems that arise between them during the course of the betting contest.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Share stories with classmates about dares you have accepted or issued. Why did you do this? What was the outcome?
2. With classmates, draw up clear rules for the conditions of the bet about eating worms that will eliminate the conflicts among the boys as the contest plays out.
3. Create your own virtual worm recipes using, for example, gummy worms or Tootsie Rolls formed into worms.
4. Share with classmates foods you have eaten that are uncommon in your culture, and share foods that you enjoy as part of your culture that are uncommon to your classmates.
5. Create a pet worm bin in your home or an outdoor compost bin. Share observations on worm behavior with classmates.
6. Have you ever had to apologize publicly for something, the way Alan and Joe have to do to their neighbors about being woken up in the middle of the night? Share stories about this with classmates.
7. Have you ever had a friendship that became damaged, or even ended? Describe in a journal-type entry, or share with classmates, what caused this serious problem, how you dealt with it, and the outcome.
8. Make one of the "yucky" recipes in the "yucky recipe" books listed in "Nonfiction" in "Cross-Curricular Resources."
9. Make "worms" out of hot-dog slices, and, with classmates, enjoy them as the worms Billy ate, with a variety of condiments.

Alternate Assessment

1. In chart, outline, or paragraph form, describe how Billy ate each worm. Note how (or if) each worm was cooked and what other foods (if any) Billy ate along with each worm.
2. Draw up a detailed character list for the novel. List each character's name, give a brief character description, and tell what role she or he plays in the events of the novel.
3. With some classmates, form a panel that will judge the specific claims of cheating and unfairness in the course of the fifteen-day bet made by students role-playing Alan and Joe on the one hand and Billy and Tom on the other hand.
4. Create a two-column chart. In one column, describe each of the tricks and schemes that Alan and Joe use to try to get Billy to lose the bet. In the second column, describe Billy's and Tom's responses to each trick and scheme.

Teacher's Notes

Vocabulary

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

- | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| a. keepsake | f. climbed and scrambled | k. stared with anger | p. drawing back |
| b. good, moral | g. in a stealthy way | l. calm and peaceful | q. hurrying |
| c. with shame | h. in a breezy way | m. accept as valid | r. casually |
| d. outraged | i. with too much attention | n. pitifully small | s. splotch |
| e. worrying | j. large oval dish | o. with bliss | t. shaking |

- ___ 1. Billy couldn't expect to win fifty dollars by just gulping down a few measly little baby worms.
- ___ 2. Alan marched in carrying a covered silver platter in both hands.
- ___ 3. Joe slouched along beside him, nodding and smiling obsequiously.
- ___ 4. Yergh! It was as big as a souvenir pencil from the Empire State Building!
- ___ 5. "Awrgh!" cried Billy, recoiling.
- ___ 6. Then, opening his eyes, Billy grinned beatifically up at Tom.
- ___ 7. "Hey, Billy!" burst out Tom suddenly in a hearty, quavering voice.
- ___ 8. Tom clambered up from the floor, brushing himself off.
- ___ 9. On the plate before Billy lay the last bite of worm under a daub of ketchup and mustard.
- ___ 10. Tom began to feel put-upon and indignant and stubborn.
- ___ 11. Billy spun around just in time to catch a glimpse of Tom pelting out the door.
- ___ 12. Billy gulped the worm triumphantly, serene, untroubled.
- ___ 13. By the door, Alan glowered, his mind racing.
- ___ 14. Outside, Tom lurked sheepishly in the bushes behind the stone wall, peering at the barn.
- ___ 15. Billy strolled airily out of the barn, remarking over his shoulder, "See you tomorrow, fellows."
- ___ 16. Alan and Joe gazed nonchalantly at the ceiling.
- ___ 17. "They're big worms, Mrs. Forrester," said Joe, looking virtuous.
- ___ 18. Billy had a gnawing feeling he had forgotten something.
- ___ 19. Joe peered furtively out through the fringe of the bedspread.
- ___ 20. "Take it easy," said Joe. "We concede. At least I do."

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. You will use one name twice.

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|----------------|
| a. Billy | d. Mr. Forrester | g. Dr. McGrath |
| b. Alan | e. Mrs. Forrester | h. Pete |
| c. Joe | f. Mr. Phelps | i. Tom |

- ___ 1. Cooks up the schemes to trick Billy.
- ___ 2. Invents smothered worm and worm ice-cream-cake recipes.
- ___ 3. Has a nightmare about huge black worms as big as snakes.
- ___ 4. Assures Billy's mother that eating worms is not harmful.
- ___ 5. Carries a sleeping Billy into Billy's house late one night.
- ___ 6. Runs off rather than eat a worm with Billy.
- ___ 7. Cranks up his siren just before midnight.
- ___ 8. Orders Billy to his room before Billy can eat the last worm.
- ___ 9. Worries a lot about losing fifty dollars.
- ___ 10. Comes up with the idea to fry the worms in a cornmeal coating.

Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

- 1. Billy's last name is (**Phelps, Forrester, McGregor, O'Hara**).
- 2. To win the bet, Billy must eat (**ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty**) worms.
- 3. Tom won't let Joe pick a worm from the (**manure, wood, compost, leaf**) pile.
- 4. After he eats the first worm, Billy prances around the barnyard like a (**frog, donkey, rabbit, chicken**).
- 5. Tom makes up a poem to help Billy think of (**hot dogs, chicken fingers, fish, dessert**) while he's eating the worms.
- 6. Alan worries that Billy might win the bet because Billy is (**stubborn, anxious, oblivious, virtuous**).
- 7. Billy's father gets phone advice from (**Worm, Emergency, Helpline, Poison**) Control.
- 8. Alan and Joe ask Billy's mother to act as (**rule-maker, referee, mediator, warden**).
- 9. Alan and Joe stuff Billy with food and drink at (**the movies, Shea Stadium, a birthday party, Yankee Stadium**).
- 10. Joe and Alan have to give each neighbor a personal (**gift, invitation, apology, helping hand**).
- 11. Joe's last name is (**O'Hara, Shea, Phelps, McDougal**).
- 12. Billy likes to make himself fried-worm (**omelets, pancakes, sandwiches, hamburgers**).
- 13. Billy's younger sister is named (**Patricia, Helen, Susie, Emily**).
- 14. Joe and Alan send Billy's mother a fake (**prescription, letter, fax, magazine article**).
- 15. Billy's father stops Joe and Alan from putting Billy into the (**tool closet, manure pile, basement, cistern**).

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- ___ 1. The four boys often argue and yell about the terms of the bet.
- ___ 2. Billy makes the bet because he likes to eat worms.
- ___ 3. Tom chooses the first night crawler for Billy to eat.
- ___ 4. Tom has a younger brother.
- ___ 5. Billy doesn't worry about Joe's warnings that eating worms is actually very dangerous.
- ___ 6. Billy actually begins to enjoy eating worms.
- ___ 7. Because of Joe and Alan's trickery, Billy eats a two-foot-long worm.
- ___ 8. Billy wakes up just before midnight and manages to eat that day's worm on time.
- ___ 9. Alan and Joe plan to stop Billy from winning the bet by keeping him locked up.
- ___ 10. At the last moment, Billy loses the bet.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Why do Billy and Alan make the bet? What are the terms of the bet?
- 2. Describe two or three of the schemes Joe comes up with to get Billy to lose the bet.
- 3. How do Billy's parents react to the bet? How do they help and also hinder Billy as the bet plays out?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each quotation. Find the character who speaks the words in the list below. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. You will use one name twice.

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|
| a. Billy | d. Mr. Forrester | g. "Dr. McGrath" |
| b. Alan | e. Mrs. Forrester | h. Pete |
| c. Joe | f. Mr. Phelps | i. Tom |

- ___ 1. "Don't worry. We got him thinking. It takes time. I got it all doped out. Trust me."
- ___ 2. "Catch!"
- ___ 3. "I'd eat one bite of anything before I'd let them send me up to my room right after supper."
- ___ 4. "Billy has to eat every bit himself. Alan and Joe were very firm about that, and I'm the referee."
- ___ 5. "I would strongly recommend that your son William eat no more worms until I return on Thursday from New York City."
- ___ 6. "And that's why Billy woke the whole neighborhood up? to show you he hadn't been tricked?"
- ___ 7. "Suppose I lose? My father'll never let me take the money out of my savings account."
- ___ 8. "All the time you're eating the worm, keep saying to yourself: fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish."
- ___ 9. "I do know that Billy's not going to die before morning. If worms were poisonous, which they're not, he would have been laid up before this."
- ___ 10. "That's not a worm! How can it be a worm? Geez, it must be two feet long!"

Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. Alan's last name is (**Tator, Forrester, O'Hara, Phelps**).
2. If Billy wins the bet, Alan has to pay him (**twenty, forty, fifty, one hundred**) dollars.
3. At first, Billy says worms are just (**dirt, fish, manure, bugs**).
4. The first worm is a big (**hornworm, red wiggler, night crawler, mealyworm**).
5. Billy eats the first nine worms in the (**kitchen, barn, dining room, meadow**).
6. Billy plans to buy a (**minibike, skateboard, scooter, iPod**) if he wins the bet.
7. Tom coats the worms with (**chocolate, peanut butter, ketchup, cornmeal**) before frying them.
8. Billy dreams about worms as big as (**baseball bats, snakes, jump ropes, fish sticks**).
9. Joe and Alan join two worms with (**butter, staples, hair gel, glue**).
10. Billy's mother creates an ice-cream cake called Whizbang (**Double Fudge, Tutti-Frutti, Worm Delight, Worm Melt**).
11. Mr. Phelps brings a sleeping Billy home late at night from a (**movie, baseball game, party, football game**).
12. Pete wakes up everyone in the neighborhood with his (**siren, whistle, bullhorn, motorcycle**).
13. Joe and Alan feed Billy a fake worm made of (**sausage, peanut butter, beans, hash**).
14. Alan and Joe lock Billy in the barn's (**cistern, horse stall, hay loft, tool closet**).
15. Billy pulls the last worm up to his bedroom window in a(n) (**silver platter, Easter basket, soda can lunch box**).

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- ___ 1. Billy has no brothers or sisters.
- ___ 2. Billy slathers the cooked worms with ketchup, mustard, and horseradish.
- ___ 3. Joe says that his parents know that eating worms is very dangerous.
- ___ 4. To reassure Billy, Tom eats a worm, too.
- ___ 5. Billy's mother talks to their family doctor about eating worms.
- ___ 6. Alan is certain all along that Billy will crack and lose the bet.
- ___ 7. Tom hatches the schemes to trick Billy into losing the bet.
- ___ 8. The boys' verbal arguments finally erupt into a physical fight that hurts all of them.
- ___ 9. Billy's family doctor sends a letter warning about the dangerous effects of eating worms.
- ___ 10. Billy wins the bet.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. In what ways does Tom help Billy with the bet?
- 2. Describe the ways in which Billy thwarts two or three of Joe's bet-losing schemes.
- 3. Describe each of the four boys—Billy, Alan, Joe, and Tom—in one sentence for each boy.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

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

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Forrester | 9. Shea Stadium |
| 2. fifteen | 10. apology |
| 3. manure | 11. O'Hara |
| 4. chicken | 12. sandwiches |
| 5. fish | 13. Emily |
| 6. stubborn | 14. letter |
| 7. Poison | 15. cistern |
| 8. referee | |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

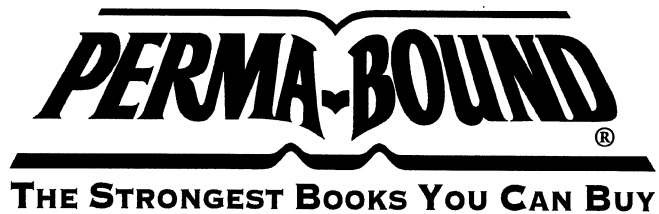
- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Phelps | 9. glue |
| 2. fifty | 10. Worm Delight |
| 3. dirt | 11. baseball game |
| 4. night crawler | 12. siren |
| 5. barn | 13. beans |
| 6. minibike | 14. tool closet |
| 7. cornmeal | 15. Easter basket |
| 8. snakes | |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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