

This guide was prepared using the Anchor Books edition, Doubleday ©1995. Other editions may differ.

Synopsis

Note: Each of the twelve chapters corresponds to a month and is accompanied by a recipe.

Chapter 1

Elena De la Garza gives birth to her third daughter, Tita, in the kitchen. While still in her mother's womb, Tita wept so violently as her mother began chopping onions that she caused Mama Elena to go into labor. Mama Elena cannot produce milk, so she gives the infant to the cook Nacha, who raises Tita in the kitchen. Tita thus views the world through the prism of food and becomes a superb cook. As with her older sisters Rosaura and Gertrudis, Tita also cleans, sews, and waits on her tyrannical mother on their ranch in turn-of-the-century Mexico. One day, handsome Pedro Muzquiz comes to propose to Tita, but Mama Elena refuses: according to the family tradition, the youngest daughter must never marry so she can care for her mother in her old age. Mama Elena offers her second daughter Rosaura to Pedro and they marry. Tita is crushed, but submits even though she loves Pedro. Feeling chilled to the bone, Tita begins to knit a huge afghan.

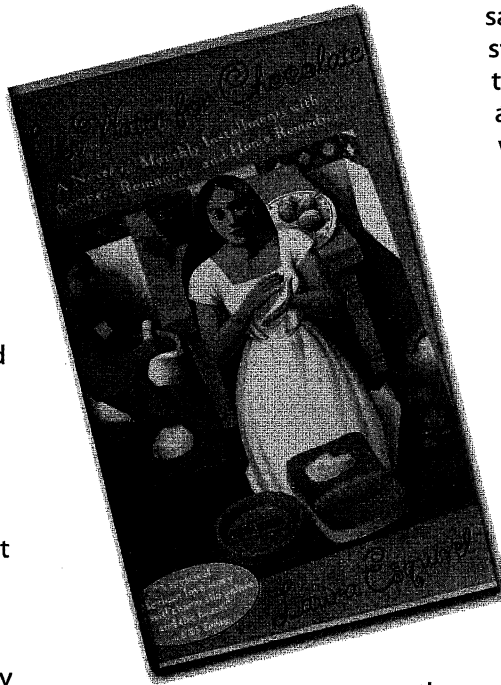
Chapter 2

Tita and Nacha work furiously to prepare the food for Pedro and Rosaura's huge wedding feast. Upset that her beloved Pedro is marrying her sister, Tita has hallucinations. Rebuked by her mother, Tita labors on but finally breaks down in tears, which drip into the cake. Nacha tastes the icing to see if Tita's tears have made it salty and is suddenly overcome with emotion for her long-lost lover. Tita is stoical during the wedding. Pedro declares his undying love to Tita and explains that he married

Rosaura just to be near Tita. Disaster erupts when the guests eat the cake and are consumed with longing, as Nacha had been before. This is accompanied by violent vomiting, wrecking the wedding. Mama Elena accuses Tita of poisoning the cake and beats her viciously. They find Nacha dead, clutching a portrait of her lost lover.

Chapter 3

Pedro gives Tita a bouquet of roses, which Tita uses to prepare quail in rose petal sauce. The delicious dish has a strange sexual power: Tita is the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and Gertrudis the medium. Filled with heat and passion, Gertrudis tries to shower but her body heat causes the shower to explode. Naked, Gertrudis runs into the woods. Juan, a soldier in the revolutionary army, swoops her up and they make passionate love. When her affair with the soldier cannot quench her passion, Gertrudis becomes a prostitute in the local brothel. Declaring her daughter dead, Mama Elena burns Gertrudis' birth certificate and pictures. Tita, in contrast, celebrates her sister's liberation by preparing



the quail dish once a year on the anniversary of her liberation.

Chapter 4

In April, Rosaura goes into labor and Pedro leaves to fetch Dr. Brown. The Mexican Revolution is raging and Pedro is captured by the federales and detained. With Mama and the servants gone, Tita must assist at the birth. Rosaura has a very difficult time, but Tita's calm assurance saves mother and child. Rosaura has no milk, so Tita nourishes the infant with the milk that mysteriously fills her breasts. Tita deeply loves the baby, a boy named Roberto. She prepares a great feast to celebrate the child's baptism. Noticing that the love between Tita and Pedro is even stronger and that Tita has

bonded with Roberto, Mama Elena arranges to have husband, wife, and child sent to San Antonio.

Chapter 5

In May, the Revolutionary Army comes to raid the farm. Mama defiantly scares them off, but she never learns that the man she defies is Gertrudis' lover Juan. Soon after, Tita and her mother get the news that baby Roberto has died, likely because he was deprived of Tita's milk. Tita blames her mother for Roberto's death and suffers a nervous breakdown. Elena orders Tita to be sent to an asylum. Dr. John Brown rescues Tita. As Tita is taken away, Chenchita the maid runs after her and throws her the enormous bedspread that Tita has been knitting.

Chapter 6

Dr. Brown takes Tita to his home and gently nurses her back to health. At Dr. Brown's house Tita is visited daily by a gentle, silent woman, who turns out to be the ghost of John's grandmother, a Native American named Morning Light. Tita does not speak, but she and John grow close.

Chapter 7

By July, Tita is fully recovered. She decides never to return to the ranch and accepts Dr. Brown's marriage proposal. Revolutionaries raid the ranch, raping Chenchita and beating Mama Elena, leaving her a paraplegic. Despite her pledge, Tita returns to the ranch to care for her mother. The first night, Tita carefully prepares a strengthening ox-tail soup that had helped her recover. Mama Elena rejects the soup, screaming that it is poisoned. From then on, Mama Elena is convinced that Tita is trying to poison her. Mama Elena dies within the month, likely from taking an emetic to counter the effects of Tita's "poison" in her food. Tita discovers youthful love letters between Elena and Jose Trevino, who was half black. Mama Elena's parents forbid the relationship and forced Elena into a marriage to Juan De la Garza. Mama Elena continued the affair, and she became pregnant with Gertrudis. Elena planned to run away with her lover but he was murdered so she continued her empty marriage, and hid the true identity of her second child's father. Tita mourns her mother and her disappointed life.

Chapter 8

Rosaura has a daughter, whom they name Esperanza. Tita loves the child dearly and raises her in the kitchen, as Rosaura is bedridden. To Tita's horror, Rosaura vows that Esperanza will take care

of her in her old age instead of marrying. Wild with rage, Tita prepares champondongo, as John is coming to ask for her hand in marriage. She experiences a sensation of tremendous heat. Chenchita returns to the ranch, happily married. Tita takes a shower and her rage dissipates. Pedro is watching her lustfully. Later, when John formally petitions Pedro for Tita's hand in marriage, Pedro agrees. After John leaves, Pedro and Tita make passionate love. An odd glow emanates from the room.

Chapter 9

Tita suspects that she is pregnant. Rosaura has gotten enormously fat and constantly expels gas. Tita graciously gives Rosaura an effective diet and gas treatment, even though she loves Pedro. Mama Elena's ghost appears and curses Tita. Now a general in the revolutionary army, Gertrudis gallops up with fifty troops and her lover Juan. Tita is joyous at the return of her lost sister.

Chapter 10

Gertrudis urges Tita to tell Pedro about the pregnancy. At first, Pedro is joyous and wants to run away with Tita, but he then remembers his family. Mama Elena's ghost appears, and orders Tita to leave the house. Tita stands up to the ghost, declaring her hatred, which banishes the ghost. At that moment, Tita's period starts. Mama Elena's ghost, a spinning light, becomes a fireball and sets Pedro on fire. Tita nurses the badly-burnt Pedro back to health. Gertrudis and her regiment leave the ranch and John returns.

Chapter 11

Rosaura confronts Tita about her relationship with Pedro, and Tita expresses her anger at Rosaura for marrying Pedro. They fight bitterly and Rosaura forbids Tita from seeing Esperanza. Tita tells John the truth of her relationship with Pedro. John says that he still loves Tita and is willing to marry her. He leaves the decision in her hands.

Chapter 12

Many years have passed. Tita and Chenchita are preparing for the wedding of Esperanza and Alex, Dr. Brown's son from his first marriage. Rosaura is dead, killed by her mysterious gas. After the last guest leaves the wedding, Pedro and Tita make love. Their passion ignites a great fire and they perish in ecstasy. The townspeople mistake the explosion for fireworks celebrating the wedding. Returning from their honeymoon, Esperanza and Alex find the ranch burned to the ground. They discover Tita's cookbook under the ashes.

Timeline of Modern Mexican History

1910 Epic Revolution, led by Emiliano Zapata.
1911 Dictator Porfirio Diaz overthrown. Political unrest continues; Zapata leads a peasant revolt in the south.
1913 Madero assassinated; Victoriano Huerta seizes power.
1914 Huerta resigns, succeeded by Venustiano Carranza.
1916 U.S. forces cross the border in pursuit of guerrilla leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa.
1917 U.S. forces withdraw, having failed to kill Villa. A new constitution is adopted.
1920 Carranza murdered; civil war follows.
1929 National Revolutionary Party formed.
1934 President Lazaro Cardenas begins oil nationalization, land reform, and industrial expansion.
1940 Leon Trotsky murdered in Mexico.
1942 Mexico declares war on Japan and Germany.
1946 National Revolutionary Party re-named the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI.
1960s Government suppresses peasant and labor unrest.
1968 Police fire on student demonstrators in Tlatelolco, Mexico City. Hundreds of protesters are killed or wounded.
1976 Huge oil reserves discovered in southern state of Chiapas.
1985 Earthquake in Mexico City kills thousands and makes many more homeless.
1993 Parliament ratifies the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the U.S. and Canada.
1994 Government troops suppress guerrilla rebellion in Chiapas. The rebels oppose NAFTA and want greater recognition for Indian rights. The government recognizes the Zapatista National Liberation Front (EZLN).
1994 Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon elected president. The stock market plunges; the peso loses a third of its value.
1995 Former President Carlos Salinas goes into exile. Government and the EZLN reach an agreement on greater autonomy for the

indigenous Mayans of Chiapas.
1996 Insurgency in the south escalates as the leftist Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) attacks government troops. Under President Clinton's direction, U.S. Border Patrols are bolstered, sensors are installed, and 40 miles of 14-foot fence is built to deter the flow of illegal immigrants.
1997 PRI suffers heavy losses in elections and loses its overall majority in the lower house of parliament for the first time since 1929.
1997 Paramilitary gunmen kill 45 Indians killed in a Chiapas village, sparking an international outcry.
1998 Governor of Chiapas resigns. Peace talks with the rebels are reactivated, but break down at the end of the year.
2000 Vicente Fox wins presidential elections, the first opposition candidate ever to do so.
2001 Zapatista guerrillas, led by Subcomandante Marcos, stage their "Zapatour," a march from Chiapas to Mexico City to highlight their demands. Parliament passes a bill increasing the rights of indigenous people. A few days later, Marcos rejects the bill, saying it leaves the Indian population worse off than before. President Fox appoints a prosecutor to investigate the disappearance of left-wing activists during the 1970s and 1980s.
2002 Roberto Madrazo wins leadership of the PRI. Millions of secret security files are released, shedding light on the torture and killing by security forces of hundreds of political activists in the 1960s and 1970s. Former president Luis Echeverria questioned about massacres of student protesters in 1968, when he was interior minister, and in 1971 when he was president. Three army officers charged with first-degree murder over the killings of 134 leftists in the 1970s.
2004 Investigator rules that 1971 shooting of student protesters by government

forces was genocide; judge refuses to order arrest of former President Luis Echeverria on charges that he ordered attack.

2005 Six prison officers are murdered and top-security jails are put on high alert amid escalating tension between the authorities and drug gangs. Congress strips Mexico City mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of his immunity from prosecution in a land dispute. The government eventually abandons the prosecution.

2006 Special prosecutor is named to tackle violent crime against women, in response to UN criticism over the unsolved murders of more than 300 women over 12 years in the border city of Ciudad Juarez. Sixty-five men trapped by an explosion at a coal mine in Coahuila are presumed dead. President Fox orders an investigation.

Author Sketch

Most sources are not willing to authenticate the exact date of Laura Esquivel's birth, placing it around 1951. Wikipedia.com, however, claims that the author was born September 30, 1950. All sources do agree that Esquivel was born in Mexico, the third of four children of telegraph operator Julio Caesar Esquivel and his wife Josephina.

Esquivel was educated at the Escuela Normal de Maestros in Mexico. After an eight-year stint as a teacher, Esquivel turned her sights to a career as a film writer. By then, she had married Alfonso Arau, a film director. In 1985, the couple wrote the screenplay for *Chido One*, a Mexican movie that Arau directed.

The film was a commercial and critical success, which prompted husband and wife to adapt *Like Water for Chocolate* for the screen. As with the novel, the movie proved to be wildly popular and the couple continued their collaboration. They subsequently produced *Regina*, a screenplay of a film about a female Christ, based on Antonio Belasco Pina's novel of the same name.



The marriage subsequently disintegrated, as Esquivel sued Arau in New York State Supreme Court for allegedly reneging on a promise to pay her five percent of the film's net profits. Esquivel subsequently married Javier Valdez, a dentist. They live in Mexico City.

Food has been an important element in Esquivel's life from her infancy. Not surprisingly, Esquivel's hobby is cooking. Thinking back to her early cooking experiences and the delicious smells of food she remembers from her grandmother's home, Esquivel told Molly O'Neill of the *New York Times*: "I watch cooking change the cook, just as it transforms the food. . . Food can change anything."

Critic's Corner

Although she has written several other books and screenplays, Laura Esquivel's fame to date rests on *Like Water for Chocolate*. A number-one best-seller in Mexico in 1990, the book has been translated into numerous languages, including an English version, which enjoyed a long run on the *New York Times* best-seller list in 1993. According to *Publishers Weekly*, the movie became one of the highest-grossing foreign films of the decade.

Weaving in elements of magic realism, the novel combines culinary knowledge, sensuality, fables, and Mexican culture to capture what *Washington Post* reviewer Mary Batts Estrada called "the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen." James Polk in *Tribune Books* agreed, saying, "Food, sex and magic are wondrously interwoven." Writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Karen Stabiner remarked that Esquivel's novel "is a wondrous, romantic tale, fueled by mystery and superstition, as well as by the recipes that introduce each chapter." James Polk, in the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote that "*Like Water for Chocolate* (a Mexican colloquialism meaning, roughly, agitated or excited) is an inventive and mischievous romp—part cookbook, part novel."

In 1994, *Like Water for Chocolate* won the prestigious ABBY award from the American Booksellers Association.

Other Works by Laura Esquivel

Novels

Ley del Amor, published as *The Law of Love*, 1996.
Intimas Suculencias: Tratado Filosofico de Cocina, 1998.
Between Two Fires: Intimate Writings on Life, Love, Food, and Flavor, 2000.
Tan Velos Como el Deseo, published as *Swift as Desire*, 2001.
Malinche, 2006

Media

Chido One (screenplay), 1985.
Like Water for Chocolate (screenplay), 1993.
Little Ocean Star (screenplay for children), 1994.

Bibliography

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Volume 29, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1999.

Periodicals

Entertainment Weekly, April 23, 1993, p. 52; December 31, 1993, pp. 203-204; January 7, 1994, p. 47.
Hispanic Times, December/January 1996, p. 42.
Kirkus Reviews, July 1, 1996, p. 917.
Los Angeles Times Book Review, November 1, 1992, p. 6.
Ms., November/December, 1993, p. 75.
Nation, June 14, 1993, p. 846.
New Republic, March 1, 1993, pp. 24-25.
New Statesman, August 27, 2001, Rachel Cooke, "Pleasure Zone," p. 39.
New Yorker, June 27, 1994, p. 80.
New York Times, March 31, 1993, pp. C1, C8; October 7, 2001.
New York Times Book Review, November 17, 1996, p. 11.
Publishers Weekly, May 17, 1993, p. 17; August 15, 1994, p. 13; October 3, 1994, p. 40; February 5, 1996, p. 24; July 3, 2000.
John F. Baker, "Esquivel Back to Family for Crown," p. 12; December 4, 2000, review of *Between Two Fires*, p. 70; July 16, 2001, review of *Swift as Desire*, p. 165.
Time, April 5, 1993, pp. 62-63.
Times Literary Supplement, October 18, 1996, p. 23; October 5, 2001, Claudia Pugh-Thomas, review of *Swift as Desire*, p. 26.

Tribune Books, October 18, 1992, p. 8.
Washington Post, September 25, 1992, p. B2.

Internet Sources

Contemporary Authors Online, Thomson Gale, 2006.

General Objectives

1. To compare and contrast different cultural norms
2. To probe the effect of repressed emotions
3. To interpret how and why the female characters break the bonds of tradition
4. To analyze the intermingling of realism and fantasy
5. To understand the healing power of food
6. To realize the importance of compassion
7. To explore the author's use of humor
8. To decode symbols
9. To examine the importance of love
10. To identify the narrator

Specific Objectives

1. To explore the limited options available to Mexican women at the turn of the century
2. To analyze why Tita suffers a nervous breakdown and is rendered mute
3. To describe how Gertrudis and Juan represent the love denied to Tita and Pedro
4. To understand the author's use of magic realism and its conventions
5. To see how Tita's emotions and love are channeled through her cooking
6. To appreciate John Brown's unselfish love and devotion to Tita
7. To evaluate Tita's decision to leave John's house and return to the ranch to nurse her mother
8. To analyze what the roses, quails, fire and other symbols represent in the novel
9. To appreciate the ironic parallels between Mama Elena's thwarted love and Tita's thwarted love.
10. To realize that the narrator is Tita's great-niece

The Importance of Setting

Like Water for Chocolate is set in Mexico around the turn of the 20th century. The action centers on the ranch of the fictional De la Garza family, but the Mexican Revolution that forms the backdrop of the action is real.

For most of Mexico's modern history, a small minority controlled most of the country's power and wealth, while the majority of the population lived and toiled in poverty. Under General Díaz's regime (1877-1910), the gulf between the privileged and the disenfranchised grew wider. Díaz finally announced that Mexico was ready for democracy, but refused to cede power.

Francisco Madero spearheaded a series of strikes throughout the country, opposing the Díaz government and supporting democracy. In 1910, Díaz was forced to hold an election and Madero amassed a significant number of the votes, a major step toward democracy. Díaz responded by throwing Madero into jail. Madero fled to the United States, said the elections had been a fraud, and declared himself Mexico's president. On November 20, 1910, Madero called for an uprising. This became the start of the Mexican Revolution.

Other Mexican rebels joined the revolution, most notably Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. The decisive moment in the Revolution came when the rebels captured Ciudad Juárez. In May 1911, Díaz resigned and fled to France. Madero was elected president.

Meanwhile, Mexico broke in factions. Guerrillas roamed the country, destroying and burning down many large haciendas and ranches. This is shown in *Like Water for Chocolate* when the rebels try to seize the De la Garza ranch but Mama Elena runs them off.

The turbulence of this era in Mexican history also mirrors the characters' emotional upheavals and their personal struggles for freedom and independence. This is especially true of the women in the novel. Due to the social mores of the previous generation, Mama Elena was forced to marry a



man she did not love; Nacha was prevented from marrying the man she did love. This is mirrored in the next generation: Rosaura is forced to marry Pedro, whom she does not love; Tita is prevented from marrying Pedro, whom she does love. But Gertrudis runs off with a revolutionary and eventually becomes one herself. A generation later, the narrator, Tita's great-niece, receives a fine education and marries for love. These two examples show that life would change for women: they would be able to choose their own path in life. Women would achieve freedom of choice and the ability to lead an independent life.

Literary Terms and Applications

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

magic realism characterized by elements of the fantastic and dreamlike elements woven into an otherwise realistic story. Magic realism also includes materials derived from myth and fairy tales. This literary device is evident from the very first pages, shown in Tita's birth. While still in her mother's womb, Tita was so affected by the smell of chopped onions that she was "literally washed into the world on a great flood of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor." Later, when the flood of tears dried, the cook swept up the salt, enough to fill a ten-pound sack.

narrator the person or voice who tells the story. *Like Water for Chocolate* has a mysterious narrator. It is not until the very end of the novel that readers learn the narrator's identity: she is Tita's great-niece, Esperanza's daughter. Since she describes past events from the context of the present, the narrator is able to recount these events without having to account for their realism. This further allows the author to use elements of magic realism. That the narrator is a woman also shows how far women have come from Tita's day in the early 1900s. Last, as the daughter of Alex and Esperanza, the narrator serves as proof of the triumph of Tita's spirit, because the family tradition prohibiting the marriage of the youngest daughter has been successfully abolished.

symbol a person, place, or object that represents an abstract idea. For example, a dove may symbolize peace or a rose may symbolize love. *Like Water for Chocolate* contains many symbols, most centered around food. The quails, for example, represent Tita's sexual passion for Pedro. The ox-tail soup floods Tita with memories of the way her beloved Nacha had conveyed her love with carefully-prepared foods. As a result, the soup frees Tita's tears and she is on the road to recovery. The soup, then, symbolizes unselfish love.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Nonfiction

John Fisher, *The Rough Guide to Mexico*
 Carl Franz, *The People's Guide to Mexico*
 Gilbert Joseph, *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*
 Miles Harvey, *Look What Came from Mexico*
 Anna Strieffert, *Mexico*

Fiction

Rudolfo A. Anaya, *Tortuga*
 James Berry, *The Future-Telling Lady and Other Stories*
 Lori M. Carlson and Cynthia L. Ventura, *When Angels Glide at Dawn: New Stories from Latin America*
 Denise Chavez, *The Flying Tortilla Man*
 Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, *Fair Gentlemen of Belken County*
 Ernesto Galarza, *Barrio Boy*
 Kevin McColley, *The Walls of Pedro Garcia*
 Tomas Rivera, *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*
 Charles Tatum, *Mexican American Literature*

Videos/Films

Bandido (1956)
Big Night (1996)
Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands (1978)
Erendira (1983)
Far and Away (1992)
Juarez (1939)
The Left-Handed Gun (1958)
The Legends of the Fall (1994)
The Mask of Zorro (1998)
Old Gringo (1989)
One True Thing (1998)
Perdita Durango (1997)
Viva Villa! (1934)
Viva Zapata! (1952)

Internet

Laura Esquivel on "Like Water for Chocolate"
www.salon.com/oct96/interview961104.html
The Law of Love - Laura Esquivel
www.randomhouse.com/features/lawoflove/author.html
Barnes & Noble.com - Laura Esquivel
www.barnesandnoble.com/writers/writer.asp?
Laura Esquivel - Wikipedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laura_Esquivel
Laura Esquivel at Mostly Fiction
mostlyfiction.com/latin/esquivel.htm

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Laura's Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* should include these aspects:

Themes

- duality
- emotions
- food
- family
- feminism and women
- independence
- loneliness
- love
- mother-daughter relationships
- rebellion

Motifs

- struggling for independence
- analyzing the effects of heat and fire
- using food to convey emotions
- dealing with loneliness
- sublimating fury
- feeling true love and passion
- mothering your sister's children
- experiencing wondrous and unrealistic events
- joining a revolutionary army
- uncovering family secrets

Meaning Study

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

1. "To the table or to bed/You must come if you are bid." (frontispiece)

(This quotation, which opens the novel, announces that the author will link food and sensuality in the narrative. It will be the controlling image. For instance, when Mama Elena forbids Tita to marry Pedro, Tita contrives to keep his passion flaming through food. The quail in the rose petal sauce is the strongest example because it acts as an aphrodisiac on Pedro—as well as anyone else who eats it.)

2. "If he intends to ask for your hand, tell him not to bother. He'll be wasting his time and mine too." (p. 10)
(Here, Mama Elena reminds Tita of the family tradition: the youngest daughter is forbidden to marry because she must stay home and care for her mother in her mother's old age. This tradition and Mama Elena's tyrannical selfishness results in Tita's life of thwarted love and lost happiness.)
3. For Tita she had made an exception; she had been killing her a little at a time since she was a child, and she still hadn't quite finished her off. (p. 49)
(Here, Tita recalls how Mama Elena kills creatures with a single blow, a symbol of her brutality. In contrast, Mama Elena kills Tita a little at a time. The older woman is a masterpiece of cruelty, a broadly-drawn portrait of malice. She tortures Tita mentally as well as physically, not only beating her brutally—even breaking her nose—but also removing everyone she loves, especially Pedro and his baby Roberto. Later, readers learn that Mama Elena herself had been a victim of thwarted love, which serves only to underscore her viciousness.)
4. Tita knew through her own flesh how fire transforms the elements, how a lump of corn flour is changed into a tortilla, how a soul that hasn't been warmed by the fire of love is lifeless, like a useless ball of corn flour. (p. 65)
(The change of elements through food is a central symbol in the novel. Just as heat changes food, so the fire of passion ignites love. The alchemy of love transforms the base metal of human beings into the gold of love. When Pedro does not touch her, Tita becomes bitterly cold, so much so that she makes an afghan to keep her warm. By the end of the novel, the afghan is the size of the entire ranch.)

5. "I have a very good aim and a very bad temper, Captain. The next shot is for you, and I assure you that I can shoot you before they can kill me, so it would be best for us to respect each other." (p. 86)
(Mama Elena courageously holds the revolutionary soldiers at bay. Although she has a rifle, the soldiers are far more heavily armed and she is greatly outnumbered. The soldier she stands up against (ironically, Gertrudis' lover Juan), so fears Mama Elena's power that he only steals some food and leaves the woman and her ranch otherwise untouched. This scene provides outside confirmation of Mama Elena's power. If she can hold off a band of marauding soldiers, what chance does her daughter Tita have against her power?)
7. "Here's what you can do with your orders! I'm sick of them! I'm sick of obeying you!" (p. 99)
(Baby Roberto has died. Removed from Tita's milk, he has stopped eating. Tita blames her mother for his death because Mama Elena had arranged for Pedro and his family to move to San Antonio to get Pedro away from Tita. This is the first time that Tita stands up to her mother. Mama Elena does not accept Tita's defiance; rather, she strikes her daughter across her face. Her nose broken, Tita takes refuge in the dovecote. Because of her grief and pain, Tita becomes mute. Only Dr. John's love can once again warm her soul.)
8. "Each person has to discover what will set off those explosions in order to live, since the combustion that occurs when one of them is ignited is what nourishes the soul." (p. 115)
(Speaking through Dr. Brown, the author explains her philosophy of life. Each person is born with a box of matches inside of them, but people are unable to strike the matches themselves: they need oxygen and a candle to help. The oxygen comes from a lover; the candles from any food, music, or caress that ignites the matches. If people do not find the spark to their souls in time, the box of matches will become damp and never light. If that happens, the soul will leave the body and try to find the food it needs. The body will be left behind, cold and defenseless. This metaphor suggests that we all need love and pleasure to lead a fulfilled life. The pleasure can come from any source, such as the arts, but we have to find it ourselves.)

9. Tita was literally "like water for chocolate" — she was on the verge of boiling over. (p. 151)
(Her love thwarted, Tita becomes increasingly irritable. She is furious because Rosaura intends to prevent her daughter Esperanza from marrying so she can continue the tradition of taking care of her mother.)
10. Tita, for her part, taught her something that was just as valuable: the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen. (p. 239)
(Tita insists that her beloved niece Esperanza be allowed to have a first-class education. In addition, she teaches the young woman all about people and their desires for love and warmth. This is the essence of the novel.)

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 is the novel's setting?
(The novel takes place in Mexico around the turn of the 20th century. Most of the action takes place on the De la Garza ranch.)
2. Why doesn't Mama Elena want Tita to marry?
(Mama Elena wants Tita to stay home and take care of her in her old age, according to tradition. This task falls to Tita because she is the youngest child.)
3. How is Nacha's situation the same as Tita's? How is it different?
(Their situations are the same because both women have fallen deeply in love with handsome young men. Further, in both cases their love is thwarted by Mama Elena. The situations are different, however, because Nacha never again sees her beloved, while Tita lives in the same house with Pedro, even though he is married to her sister. They do consummate their love, again unlike Nacha's situation.)
4. What lie does Chenchu come up with to explain to Mama why Tita is not returning home?
(Chenchu says that Tita has become a beggar.)

She adds that Tita had escaped from a lunatic asylum and is roaming the world to pay for her crime of having insulted her mother. Chenchu says that Tita has promised to return home when she has once again become an honest woman. Ironically, by living with Dr. Brown and not at home, Tita has indeed escaped from a lunatic asylum.)

5. How does Rosaura die?
(She produces an excess of foul-smelling gas, which kills her.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What do the capons in Chapter Two symbolize?
(Mama Elena punishes Tita for thinking that she would ever get married by forcing her to prepare the wedding feast for Pedro and Rosaura. Mama Elena decides they will serve capons to impress the guests. Capons are castrated roosters. The task of castrating the capons falls to Tita. She finds the task brutally difficult. The birds represent Tita, her sexuality cut off at the root by tyranny. Like the capons, Tita feels that she is being fattened up for the kill and cannot escape her brutal fate—a living death with Mama Elena.)
7. Who is Jose Trevino and what function does his story serve in the novel?
(Jose had been the love of Mama Elena's life, but she was forbidden to marry him because he had black ancestry. Jose's story provides an ironic counterpart to the love between Tita and Pedro. Readers would assume that after being denied the opportunity to marry the man she loved, Mama Elena would protect Tita from the same fate. Just the opposite occurs: Mama forces Rosaura to marry a man she does not love and prevents Tita from marrying the man she does love.)
8. How does Pedro die?
(After the wedding of Alex and Esperanza, Tita and Pedro make love completely unfettered. Tita experiences a climax so intense that her closed eyes glow and she sees a brilliant tunnel. Pedro dies at the moment of ecstasy when he enters the glowing tunnel. He dies because he had experienced the greatest pleasure that a person could have. This scene, the novel's climax, brings together the symbols of fire, light, heat, and passion.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Do you think *Like Water for Chocolate* is a feminist novel? Why or why not?
(Students who see the novel as a feminist manifesto can argue that the female characters lead thwarted lives because they are denied their rights and are treated as second-class citizens. These students will place the blame on society. Students who disagree can argue that nearly all the characters lead blighted lives because of a failure of will. These students will place the blame on Mama Elena. For instance, Pedro and Tita refuse to stand up to Mama Elena and so are denied their love. Only Gertrudis experiences happiness because she refuses to bend to her mother's will.)
10. What does the title mean? How does it suit the novel's focus?
(Like Water for Chocolate is a Mexican colloquialism meaning "agitated or excited." Tita is "like water for chocolate" because she is agitated over the way her mother mistreats her. Tita strives for love, freedom, and individuality, while her mother actively blocks all these goals.)

Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Write another chapter in the same style as Esquivel uses. In your chapter, describe the life of Alex and Esperanza.
12. Write a recipe for a happy relationship. Follow the recipe style in this novel, starting with a list of ingredients and then explaining the steps needed to prepare the "dish."

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Based on the events in the novel, write a newspaper article with this headline "Food Poisoning Outbreak at Wedding?"
2. Imagine you are Tita. You want to marry Pedro but are instead forced to take care of your mother for her entire life. Write a diary entry that explains how you feel about your life.
3. The author uses a number of proverbs to convey the flavor of Mexican culture a hundred years ago. These sayings capture time-honored truths such as "The lazy man and the

stingy man end up walking the same road twice." Explain this proverb and then write three proverbs of your own that express important truths.

4. In your own words, state the novel's theme or message.
5. Delicious smells of cooking bring back pleasant memories of the past for the characters in this novel. Write about a delicious smell from your past that you remember with pleasure.
6. Writing in the *Washington Post*, critic Mary Batts Estrada argues that *Like Water for Chocolate* captures "the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen." Explain what "secrets of love and life" Esquivel reveals in *Like Water for Chocolate*.
7. Chenchá sometimes captures Tita's interest with lurid horror tales, like the one about La Llorona who sucks little children's blood. Write a horror story and read it to the class.

Drama/Speech

1. Tita is a victim of tradition: as the youngest daughter in a traditional Mexican family, she is obliged to remain unmarried and to care for her mother. With some classmates, debate a child's responsibility to his or her parents.
2. Is there such a thing as "love at first sight?" Argue the pros and cons of this issue, using examples from the novel, your own life, television, movies, newspapers, and magazines.
3. Do you think Pedro and Tita should have run off together rather than agreeing to Mama Elena's plan? Working with a small group of friends, discuss this issue.
4. With a partner, improvise a scene between Tita and John, where she explains to him why they cannot get married. Try to capture each character's emotions.
5. Create a brief movie of the wedding between Alex and Esperanza.
6. In the novel, Gertrudis says, "Look, Tita, the simple truth is that truth does not exist; it all depends on the person's point of view." Agree or disagree with this statement.

Art

1. Make a diorama showing the De la Garza's ranch. Label the characters. On an index card, write a paragraph that explains what your diorama shows.
2. Make a travel brochure to entice people to visit Mexico today. Include the entire country or focus on one specific area.
3. Draw or paint a miniature portrait of Tita that Pedro might carry hidden in a locket.
4. Design a poster for a movie version of *Like Water for Chocolate*.
5. Design a new cover for the book. The cover should make people want to read the book and suggest its contents and theme. On the inside flap, write a brief summary of the novel.

Music

1. Write a love song that Pedro might have sung for Tita. Record your song and play it for the class.
2. Learn more about Mexican music. For the class, play a recording of a modern Mexican singer or musical group.
3. Choose a dramatic scene and select background music. Play the music for the class as you read the scene.

Culture

1. The novel opens with a superstition about preventing tears when you chop an onion. List other superstitions that have to do with cooking, household chores, or daily living.
2. Look through the novel for Spanish words. Then create a Spanish-English dictionary that defines each word.
3. Tita is often guided by the rules of etiquette that she learned from the standard book of manners, Carreno's *Etiquette*. Write a brief pamphlet of manners for today. Include the most common situations that people your age are likely to encounter.

Geography/History

1. Report on Mexico's history. Include information on its geography, population, settlement, and technology.
2. Tita has little choice but to obey her mother because of the status of women in the late 19th and early 20th century. Interview a relative, friend, or neighbor who was born at least 50 years ago to find out what life was like for women at that time.
3. What happened during the Mexican Revolution? Research this topic and present your findings as a brief skit or oral report to the class.
4. Make a map showing the different states and important national sites in Mexico.

Science/Math

1. After Tita eats the quail in rose petal dish, "it was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce." What is alchemy? Who were the alchemists? Find out, and share your results with the class.
2. Rosaura almost dies in childbirth of a condition called "eclampsia." Explain what this is and how it is treated today.
3. Morning Light cures John's great-grandfather by applying leeches to bleed him. Today, scientists have discovered important new uses for these unappealing creatures. Find out how leeches are used today in medicine.
4. Make a chart showing the number of Mexican immigrants to America in the past 50 years.
5. Choose any one of the recipes and convert the measurements from metric to the American measurement system.

Alternate Assessment

1. Select one of the recipes in the novel and prepare it for the class.
2. Stage a dramatic reading of a key chapter in the novel.
3. Suppose that you could pack a suitcase like the magical one that Tita packs. List the physical and psychological items that you would include—and the ones that you would omit.
4. Imagine that you were producing a movie version of *Like Water for Chocolate*. Make a cast list and explain your choices.
5. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.

Vocabulary

Using the vocabulary words in the box, complete each sentence. You will have words left over.

revoked	repulsive	respite	reticent
ethereal	riveted	feigned	revolting
inciting	esteemed	putrid	suffice
adorning	glee	dire	repression
audacity	audible	wailing	valiant

1. The dessert that Tita made was so light that it seemed almost _____.
2. The guests ate the dish with great _____; they were so happy that they smiled as they spooned up portions.
3. _____ it to say that Tita was a master cook.
4. Despite her mother's rigid _____, Tita managed to express her emotions to Pedro.
5. When her mother finally spoke to her, Tita was astonished that the sentence of silence had been _____.
6. After all, Tita had the _____ to disobey her mother and to try to live her own life.
7. When Pedro came to call, he brought his _____ and distinguished father with him.
8. _____ calm, Tita continued to prepare her sister's wedding cake, even though her emotions were bubbling.
9. Tita needed a(n) _____ from all work, a chance to rest for a while.
10. But the baby's _____ reminded her that the child had to be fed or it would cry all night.
11. The rotten meat was _____ and had to be thrown out.
12. The baby cried very softly, but nonetheless, her cries were still _____.
13. Tita made a _____ attempt to lead her own life, but her bravery was not sufficient to withstand her mother's cruelty.
14. We might find some of the foods in the novel repugnant and _____ and not eat them, but the characters clearly found them delicious.
15. Around her mother, Tita was _____ and uncommunicative.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Plot Events (20 points)

Arrange the following events in the correct order. Place the number in the blank before each event.

- _____ In September, Mama Elena's ghost appears and curses Tita, who believes that she has become pregnant after her night of love with Pedro.
- _____ After eating Tita's quails in rose petal sauce, Gertrudis runs away, completely naked. It is March.
- _____ After Alex and Esperanza's wedding, Pedro and Tita make love.
- _____ In April, Tita delivers her sister Rosaura's baby Roberto.
- _____ In January, Tita is born on the kitchen table.
- _____ Some years later, Rosaura dies, killed by her mysterious gas
- _____ Mama Elena forces Tita to care for her rather than marrying her beloved Pedro. He is married to Tita's sister Rosaura.
- _____ In August, Rosaura has a daughter, whom they name Esperanza.
- _____ Every guest who tastes Rosaura's wedding cake becomes violently ill.
- _____ Later that August, Pedro and Tita consummate their love.
- _____ In June, Tita is rescued by Dr. Brown, who nurses her back to health.
- _____ Twenty-two years later, Esperanza marries Dr. Brown's son Alex.
- _____ In July, revolutionaries raid the ranch, leaving Mama Elena paralyzed from a blow to the spine. Mama Elena dies.
- _____ In May, baby Roberto dies. Tita blames her mother for Roberto's death and suffers a nervous breakdown.
- _____ In October, Tita learns that she is not pregnant.

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Supply a term to complete each of the following statements.

1. The novel is set in the country of _____ around the turn of the 20th century.
2. The characters live on a large farm called a(n) _____.
3. Tita has a natural talent for _____, and everyone loves her food.
4. Rosaura's wedding cake causes everyone to become sick because of the magical spell cast by Tita's sad _____.
5. Tita makes a special quail dish because she does not want to throw out the bouquet of _____ that Pedro had given her.
6. Filled with passion, Gertrudis runs naked through the fields and escapes with a _____ on a horse.
7. Furious, Mama Elena declares that her daughter Gertrudis is _____.
8. To get Pedro away from Tita, Mama Elena forces him to move to _____.
9. John's grandmother, a Native American, used herbs to _____ people of their illnesses.
10. Tita sends Gertrudis her _____ because she is afraid that Gertrudis is cold.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Write the letter of the sentence that best completes each of the following statements.

- _____ 1. In well-born Mexican families, tradition dictates that the youngest daughter
- a. marry first, before her older sister
 - b. learn to cook so she can take over the kitchen
 - c. never marry so she can stay home and care for her mother in her old age
 - d. marry last, after her older sisters and brothers
- _____ 2. Pedro agrees to marry Rosaura
- a. for the sake of her excellent cooking
 - b. because he loves her
 - c. for the family fortune
 - d. so he can be close to Tita
- _____ 3. When Mama forces Tita to make the wedding cake, Tita
- a. pours her emotions into the cake
 - b. deliberately poisons the cake
 - c. refuses outright
 - d. runs away with a soldier
- _____ 4. Gertrudis becomes a(n)
- a. lazy housewife
 - b. prostitute
 - c. excellent wife and mother to Roberto
 - d. rancher like her mother
- _____ 5. While recovering from a nervous breakdown at John's house, Tita
- a. decides that she must marry Pedro as soon as possible
 - b. has visions of John's long-dead grandmother
 - c. becomes an expert in herbal medicines
 - d. sits in the dovecote every day
- _____ 6. Mama married Juan De la Garza because
- a. she loved him very much
 - b. he was handsome and wealthy
 - c. she was pregnant with another man's child
 - d. she wanted to spite her parents

- _____ 7. Rosaura has a second child, a daughter named Esperanza, and vows that the child will
- a. take care of her in her old age instead of marrying
 - b. go to the finest college in the land
 - c. become an excellent cook
 - d. marry for love, not duty
- _____ 8. The novel's narrator is
- a. Tita
 - b. Mama Elena's ghost
 - c. Esperanza's daughter
 - d. Gertrudis
- _____ 9. The action of the novel takes place over
- a. one year
 - b. five years
 - c. ten years
 - d. more than twenty years
- _____ 10. At the end of the novel, Pedro and Tita die
- a. of old age
 - b. when they are shot by revolutionaries
 - c. when their passion ignites a fire and they perish in ecstasy
 - d. of a mysterious disease

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Describe what life is like for Tita when she is an adult.
- 2. Explain the relationship between Tita and her mother.
- 3. Explain what the novel's title means.
- 4. Analyze what food represents in this novel.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (15 points)

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

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| _____ 1. the son of Rosaura and Pedro | A. Dr. John Brown |
| _____ 2. the family's first cook, who functions as a substitute mother to Tita | B. Mama Elena |
| _____ 3. the daughter of Mama Elena and Jose Trevino | C. Chenchu |
| _____ 4. the narrator of the novel | D. Aunt Mary |
| _____ 5. Pedro's beloved Josefita | E. Nacha |
| _____ 6. the revolutionary who tries to loot Mama Elena's ranch | F. Tita |
| _____ 7. the mother of Tita, Rosaura, and Gertrudis | G. Pedro |
| _____ 8. Rosaura's husband | H. Gertrudis |
| _____ 9. the woman who brings ox-tail soup to Tita while she is staying at Dr. Brown's house | I. Alex |
| _____ 10. the character who dies when her body fills with foul gas | J. Kikapu Indian woman |
| _____ 11. Dr. Brown's son; he marries Esperanza | K. Rosaura |
| _____ 12. Dr. John's elderly, deaf aunt | L. Roberto |
| _____ 13. the family's dog | M. Esperanza |
| _____ 14. an expert in ancient herbal medicines | N. Pulque |
| _____ 15. the person who takes Tita in when she suffers a nervous breakdown | O. Juan Alejandrez |

Part II: Character Identification (20 points)

Place an X next to the statements that refer to Tita.

- _____ 1. is the youngest daughter of the household
- _____ 2. has two children by Pedro, Roberto and Esperanza
- _____ 3. is a fabulous, magical cook
- _____ 4. runs away to join the Mexican revolutionary army
- _____ 5. uses a rifle to defend her house against invasion
- _____ 6. bewitches Pedro, Gertrudis, Rosaura, Mama, and others with her quail in rose petal sauce
- _____ 7. uses leeches to cure certain illnesses
- _____ 8. is relieved to find that she is not pregnant by Pedro
- _____ 9. takes off her clothing after eating Three Kings' Bread
- _____ 10. crochets an afghan that eventually covers the entire ranch

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Cause/Effect (25 points)

Finish each statement by stating a reason.

1. Tita does not marry Pedro because _____
2. Rosaura is jealous of Tita because _____
3. Pedro marries Rosaura because _____
4. Dr. John takes Tita into his house because _____
5. The wedding cake makes the guests begin to weep because _____
6. Tita assists Rosaura in labor because _____
7. Tita has a nervous breakdown because _____
8. Mama Elena does not marry Jose Trevino because _____
9. After she becomes paralyzed, Mama won't eat the food Tita prepares because

10. The revolutionary soldiers do not empty Mama's house and destroy it because

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Argue that Tita and Pedro should have been allowed to marry.
2. Describe each of Mama Elena's daughters. Tell how they are similar and different.
3. Trace how Tita changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.
4. Summarize the plot, including the exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Answer Key

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. ethereal | 6. audacity | 11. putrid |
| 2. glee | 7. esteemed | 12. audible |
| 3. suffice | 8. feigned | 13. valiant |
| 4. repression | 9. respite | 14. revolting |
| 5. revoked | 10. wailing | 15. reticent |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Plot Events (20 points)

- __11__ In September, Mama Elena's ghost appears and curses Tita, who believes that she has become pregnant after her night of love with Pedro.
- __4__ After eating Tita's quails in rose petal sauce, Gertrudis runs away, completely naked. It is March.
- __15__ After Alex and Esperanza's wedding, Pedro and Tita make love.
- __5__ In April, Tita delivers her sister Rosaura's baby Roberto.
- __1__ In January, Tita is born on the kitchen table.
- __13__ Some years later, Rosaura dies, killed by her mysterious gas
- __2__ Mama Elena forces Tita to care for her rather than marrying her beloved Pedro. He is married to Tita's sister Rosaura.
- __9__ In August, Rosaura has a daughter, whom they name Esperanza.
- __3__ Every guest who tastes Rosaura's wedding cake becomes violently ill.
- __10__ Later that August, Pedro and Tita consummate their love.
- __7__ In June, Tita is rescued by Dr. Brown, who nurses her back to health.
- __14__ Twenty-two years later, Esperanza marries Dr. Brown's son Alex.
- __8__ In July, revolutionaries raid the ranch, leaving Mama Elena paralyzed from a blow to the spine. Mama Elena dies.
- __6__ In May, baby Roberto dies. Tita blames her mother for Roberto's death and suffers a nervous breakdown.
- __12__ In October, Tita learns that she is not pregnant.

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| 1. Mexico | 6. soldier |
| 2. ranch | 7. dead |
| 3. cooking | 8. San Antonio |
| 4. tears | 9. heal |
| 5. roses | 10. clothes |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (15 points)

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

Part II: Character Identification (20 points)

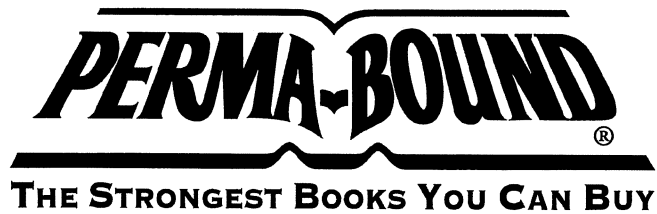
1. is the youngest daughter
3. is a fabulous, magical cook
6. bewitches Pedro, Gertrudis, Rosaura, Mama, and others
8. is relieved to find that she is not pregnant
10. crochets an afghan

Part III: Cause and Effect (25 points)

1. Mama Elena will not let her
2. her husband Pedro loves Tita
3. he want to be close to Tita
4. he helps her recover from her nervous breakdown
5. it is filled with Tita's tears
6. the doctor does not arrive in time
7. Mama Elena sent Roberto away and he died. She also can not believe that Mama Elena beat her, broke her nose, and wanted to send her to the madhouse.
8. he is partly black and intermarriage was forbidden
9. she is convinced that Tita is trying to poison her
10. Mama Elena stands up to them

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



Perma-Bound

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

Perma-Bound Canada

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

Visit us online at www.perma-bound.com