

The Midnight Fox

by Betsy Byars

Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Kathy Sammis

A Perma-Bound Production

SYNOPSIS

A city boy almost ten years old and immersed in putting together plastic model kits, Tommy is horrified when his mother tells him he is to spend two months that summer on Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred's farm while his parents take a bicycling trip through Europe. Tom's father, a high school coach, cajoles Tommy into pretending he's eager to go to the farm for the sake of his mother, a teacher who has never had a real vacation before. Just before leaving for the farm, Tommy says goodbye to his best friend Petie Burkis, who will be on his mind all summer; incidents at the farm will often remind Tom of experiences he and Petie have shared.

The next day Mom, Dad, and Tom arrive at the farm to a welcoming and friendly Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred. After his parents leave, Tom feels utterly abandoned, but manages to sit quietly and not cry, practicing the control his father always urges on him. After supper Aunt Millie shows Tommy to his room, and it's apparent Tom is nothing like Aunt Millie's now-grown boys, Fred Jr. and Bubba, who would climb out their windows at night — Tommy is afraid of heights — and went hunting and loved the outdoors.

The first three days on the farm positively drag for Tom, who has nothing to do; the heavy farm chores he expected don't materialize. Sitting in a field writing a letter to Petie, Tom looks up and sees a fox — with white-tipped black fur, as if the moon were shining on her at midnight — leaping over the crest of the field and then running lightly and quickly toward him. When the fox gets Tom's scent, she stops and looks right at him, unafraid, then bounds away. Tom is enthralled and tremendously excited. That evening Tom asks his friendly cousin Hazeline — who worries about being overweight and who goes out driving with her boyfriend Mikey each night — about foxes. From Hazeline, Tom learns that Uncle Fred loves to hunt and that when foxes start stealing people's chickens, they are shot or trapped, although it's not easy to get them, because they're very smart.

Tom's days now have a purpose: to see the fox again, which teaches Tom the new skill of patient waiting. When Tom does spot the fox four days later catching a mouse, he follows her into the woods and then follows her barks, but loses her. Hazeline tells Tom he must have been near the fox's den, and she had led him away from it with her barking. The days and weeks now pass quickly for Tom as he wanders through the woods looking for the fox, spotting her occasion-

ally. Finally, across a creek, Tom sees a hollow with a small clearing and a rock outcropping; the fox appears with a dead bird and calls her cub out of their den. Tom vows never to come to that spot again, so the midnight black fox will not feel discovered and take her cub away. Tom does continue to watch for the fox in the woods, but problems are about to begin.

Aunt Millie — extremely irritable because of a week of intense heat — announces that a fox has gotten her turkey. Uncle Fred — whom Tom finds intimidating because of his size and powerful physique — and his dog Happ will hunt and kill the fox. The next afternoon, Tom goes along with Uncle Fred and Happ; while Happ rushes off in pursuit of the fox's barks, Fred skillfully and relentlessly tracks his way to the fox's den, with Tom helpless to stop him. Uncle Fred digs the fox cub out of the den, brings it home, and locks it into an old rabbit hutch. The cub will be bait for its mother.

That night, Uncle Fred waits on the back porch; when the black fox comes for her cub, he shoots at her but misses, just as a tremendous thunder and lightning storm breaks. Because of the storm, Uncle Fred goes to bed for the night. Tom, desperate to save the fox, has only one way to get outside without the ever-vigilant Aunt Millie noticing him: he fights through his terror of heights and shimmies down the tree outside his bedroom window. Tom breaks the lock on the hutch, releasing the baby fox, who runs off in the night with his barking mother. A miserably cold and soaked Tom now rings the doorbell to get back in the house and confesses to Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred what he has done — and they tell him it's perfectly all right. For the first time all summer, Tom feels at ease with his uncle, and Aunt Millie won't worry about the fox any more because she will have taken her baby miles away and won't be back.

At the end of the next week, Tom's parents arrive — with Petie — to take Tom home, back to the city. Tom hates to say goodbye to Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred, who never once mentioned what Tom had done with the fox after that night, and he tells his parents he loved the farm. Still, over the next year, Tom's visit to the farm begins to seem hazy, as if it had happened to another boy. But some rainy nights Tom's memories become crystal-clear, and he sees the midnight fox leaping over the crest of the hill or hears her high, clear bark through the August rain.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Betsy Byars has been a children's author for over 30 years and has won many awards and honors, including the Newbery Medal in 1971 for *Summer of the Swans*. Byars was born in 1928 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and married a professor of engineering shortly after graduating from Queens College in Charlotte in 1950. While living in South Carolina and West Virginia and raising her four children, Byars began writing children's books, drawing much of her material from her own children's lives and conversations, plus real-life incidents in the news. She gained a great deal of confidence in herself as a writer after winning the Newbery. Early in the 1980s, Byars and her husband returned to South Carolina; she had always loved flying with her husband, and in 1984 she got her pilot's license. She continues to write, although in concentrated spurts now rather than every day as previously.

CRITICS' CORNER

The Midnight Fox was written after, but published before, Byars's *Trouble River*. The latter was impersonal historic fiction, while *The Midnight Fox* was very personal. Byars said, "A great deal of my own children and their activities went into it, and a great deal of myself" (*Something About the Author*, Vol. 46). Because Byars was able to accomplish what she wanted in this novel while drawing on her own personality and family experiences, the book gave her much-needed confidence in her career choice and remains her favorite. *The Midnight Fox* exhibits the elements of the Byars style often praised by critics: understanding treatment of a likable but isolated child coping with a real problem, told in simple, straightforward language from the point of view of the child protagonist, all leavened with humor. *The Horn Book* (February 1969) commented, "What distinguishes the story from many others on the same theme is the simplicity and beauty of the writing and the depth of the characterization." *Library Journal* (December 15, 1968) also praised the characterizations, and *Saturday Review* (November 9, 1968) praised Tom as "an ingratiating character," adding that "the story develops with ease and pace." *The Midnight Fox* was a 1968 Book of the Year selection of the Child Study Association of America and won a 1970 Lewis Carroll Shelf Award.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To consider the ways in which preadolescents can feel misunderstood by their parents and other adults
2. To examine common fears of childhood and their origins and how to deal with them
3. To discuss the multifaceted relationships between people and animals, especially wild animals
4. To explore the causes and feelings of alienation and loneliness among children and adolescents
5. To analyze the ways in which a significant, although perhaps ordinary, event can influence a young person's developing character
6. To consider the nature of friendship and the ways in which good friends relate to each other

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the relationship between Tom and his parents, and the degree to which they actually misunderstand him
2. To understand the relationships between Tom and his farm relatives — Aunt Millie, Uncle Fred, and Hazeline
3. To discuss the ways in which Tom feels alienated and lonely
4. To trace the ways in which Tom overcomes some of his fears during his summer on the farm
5. To consider the impact Tom's experiences on the farm have had on his developing character
6. To examine the ways in which Tom's memories of experiences with his best friend Petie help him cope with the unfamiliar life on the farm

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 page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. a brand new \$1.98 Cessna 180 model (p. 10)
(Tom spends a lot of time putting together plastic models from kits; his latest, as the novel opens, is a model of a small plane, a Cessna 180. Note that the price of \$1.98 reflects the year the novel was published, 1968; the price for a similar model kit would be much higher today.)
2. I couldn't imagine anyone having any more control than it took to sit quietly on the steps, nose and eyes dry, while being abandoned. (p. 31)
(Tom feels that his parents have given him up, as if they have no further interest in him and no inclination to come back for him in the future [although this is not actually the case]. He is bravely attempting to exercise the control his father is fond of telling him he should have more of, by not crying in spite of how abandoned he feels.)
3. "The pigment gets intensified and most of the time it'll be in just one fox in a litter." (p. 75)
(By pigment, Uncle Fred means a coloring agent within an animal — in this case, a fox — that causes its fur to be a particular color. Uncle Fred is explaining to Tom that black foxes happen when the normal red fox color somehow strengthens and deepens into a black tint, and that this happens not to all foxes born in one litter — the offspring born at one time — but usually to just one cub.)
4. a questionnaire (p. 76)
(A questionnaire is a set of questions to get personal information from people, often to draw up some sort of personality profile of an individual. Petie Burkis has sent Tom a questionnaire so he can figure out what kind of person Tom is. This is another example of Petie's budding writing skills.)
5. the ravine (p. 80)
(A ravine is a small, narrow, steep-sided valley, usually worn by running water. Tom spots the fox going in and out of the ravine.)

6. "You were probably near her den." (p. 70)
(Hazeline is talking about the fox's lair, its hidden resting or living place; this is where the fox would keep her cub, and when any threatening creature comes near the den, the fox leads it away.)
7. He bayed as he caught the scent of the fox. (p. 120)
(A bay is a deep, prolonged bark, typical of hounds as they pursue the creature they are tracking. Happ bays as he goes after the fox; as the baying fades into the distance, we know the fox is leading Happ away from her den.)
8. rabbit hutches (p. 127)
(A hutch is a small pen or coop for an animal, typically for a rabbit. Uncle Fred puts the baby fox in an old rabbit hutch, where the cub will stay and act as bait for its mother.)
9. ...using the baby fox for bait (p. 128)
(Uncle Fred is using the baby fox locked in the rabbit hutch as bait, as something to lure the midnight fox to the backyard, within range of his gun.)
10. 4-H (pp. 38, 130)
(This is a club set up by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help young rural people learn about modern farming practices and good citizenship; the four H's stand for head, heart, hands, and health, all of which are to be improved through participation in 4-H programs. Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred's children have participated in 4-H activities.)

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 1-4 Literal Level

1. How is Tom's life on the farm different from life in the city?
(First, Tom faces the terrors of the many farm animals, and he is afraid of all animals. Also, he is completely on his own all day long, as Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred are busy with their farm chores, and Tom is cut off from his best friend Petie, who is back in the city. Tom doesn't even have many plastic models to put together, or Petie to choose books for him to read, and there is no TV to watch. His world becomes an outdoor one, and in his constant searching through the woods for the fox, he gains an ease with and understanding of nature.)
2. What personal characteristics of himself does Tom tell us about?
(He is a poor swimmer and a poor athlete. His nose starts to run when he's upset. He is afraid of animals. He doesn't control himself too well and used to cry pretty easily. He's afraid of heights. He does not enjoy eating. He is not adaptable, and doesn't fit into new situations well. He doesn't want to go hunting, ever. He likes to read, but doesn't want anyone watching while he chooses

which book to read. He never used to be a good and patient waiter. Seeing something beautiful makes him feel good. He is sort of a bony person. He once made a four-page list of his fears. He gets sick when something he considers terrible happens.)

3. How does Tom first discover the midnight fox? How does he find the fox's den?
(Both are accidents. One day Tom is sitting in the field writing Petie a letter. When he looks up, he sees the fox leaping over the green crest of the field and then running straight for the grove of trees where he is sitting; he is wildly excited. Tom later finds the den by accident, even though he has been looking for it. One day he goes up the creek; while watching fish and crayfish, he looks up and sees across the creek a small clearing in a hollow with a rock outcropping. As Tom quietly watches the clearing, the midnight fox unexpectedly appears and calls her cub out of the den beneath the rocks.)
4. Describe the characteristics of foxes according to the novel.
(Foxes are very smart and tricky and are hardly ever caught by dogs. When a fox takes a chicken, the fox carries off the whole bird, leaving behind no more than a feather or two, but foxes usually only raid hen coops when they have a litter of cubs to feed. Foxes like to hunt mice on windless days when they can see the faint movements of the grass as the mice run underneath. If a threatening creature comes near a fox's den, the mother fox will lead the person or animal away with a trail of barks. Black foxes usually occur only once in a litter, if that, and they may be smarter than red foxes because they are more sought after by hunters. Foxes move very lightly and quickly. Foxes will steal eggs and hide them for future meals.)

Questions 5-8 Interpretive Level

5. How does Tom feel about going to the farm? Do things turn out the way he expected? Explain.
(Tom is utterly opposed to going to the farm. He insists he will loathe and despise every minute; he doesn't like new things and new situations. He is a city boy, and he's afraid of animals, and he will be very lonely — his parents are abandoning him! He's small and unathletic, so he'll be a disappointment to his aunt and uncle, who will no doubt expect him to perform countless manly farm chores. As it turns out, once he discovers the midnight fox, Tom loves the farm, and happily spends his days wandering through the woods. The expected farm chores turn out to be very light, and Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred turn out to be the nicest people Tommy has ever known, even after he releases the fox cub.)
6. Why does Aunt Millie want Uncle Fred to destroy the fox? How do Uncle Fred and Tom feel about this?
(Aunt Millie wants the fox destroyed because it has killed her turkey and taken a hen; if the fox isn't hunted down, it will systematically wipe out her entire chicken flock, Aunt Millie says. This approach is fine with Uncle Fred, who enjoys tracking and hunting. Tom is miserable and

frightened and feels helpless to defend the fox.)

7. How do Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred react when Tom reveals he has let the fox cub go free? Why do you think they react this way?
(Even though Aunt Millie insisted on the fox being killed, and Uncle Fred is an accomplished and matter-of-fact hunter, they react very calmly when Tom tells them what he has done. Aunt Millie says its "perfectly all right"; she has regained her good spirits now that the hot weather has broken, thanks to the storm, and says she was carrying on so about killing the fox mostly because of the heat. She also thought the baby fox was a "sweet little thing." Uncle Fred understands Tom's feelings, saying, "I never liked to see wild things in a pen myself." Now that the fox is gone, it will no longer be a problem.)
8. Describe Tom's relationship with Hazeline.
(Tom finds he can talk about anything with Hazeline, because she will answer any and all questions readily and not quiz Tom about why he wants any particular information: "Information would just pour out of her and then she would forget it." Hazeline is sympathetic to Tom, willing to teach him about wildlife, and in touch with his fears — she takes him swimming in an inner tube, offers to take him to a movie to take his mind off the fox, and tries to counsel him about the inevitable fact that wild animals die violently.)

Questions 9-11 Critical Level

9. Explain the novel's title.
(When Tom first sees the fox, he sees that her fur is black tipped with white. He thinks her fur looks frosted, as if the moon were shining on her at midnight. Tom's relationship with this midnight fox is the focal point of his summer.)
10. How does the author create suspense about what is going to happen to the fox?
(Clues that something bad is going to happen start on the first page of the novel, with an older Tom remembering "that last terrible night" when he heard "the high, clear bark of the midnight fox." Hazeline's talk about trapping chicken-killing foxes and about how much Uncle Fred loves to hunt make the reader a bit uneasy; these are hints of what is to come. When Tom discovers the fox's den and vows never to return, he adds that "an awful thing was going to happen" to cause him to break this vow, and he adds then that the fifteenth and last time he saw the fox was a "painful" memory. The following chapter is titled "Tragedy Begins," and that chapter ends with the phrase, "the tragedy of the black fox began." Once the next chapter opens with Aunt Millie telling that a fox has killed her turkey and Uncle Fred saying he will take care of it, the novel's events move steadily through Uncle Fred's stalking of the fox; suspense builds as the reader wonders how Tom can possibly save the fox from what will surely be a successful hunt, especially given all the mentions of tragedy.)

11. In telling the story of his summer on the farm, Tom keeps mentioning incidents with his friend Petie Burkis, who isn't even there with him. Why does he do this?
(By relating incidents from the totally unfamiliar life on the farm to similar experiences with his friend Petie, Tom is able to link his life on the farm with his life in the city, making the unfamiliar more recognizable and reassuring. This device also lets the author tell more about Tom's background and personality in his normal everyday setting, and the incidents with Petie add a lot of very appealing humor to the novel.)

Questions 12-14 Creative Level

12. Write some letters from Tom to Petie describing his encounters with the fox.
(Answers will vary.)
13. How do you think Tom's summer on the farm has changed him, if at all?
(Answers will vary.)
14. Write some more newspaper headlines about incidents from the novel.
(Answers will vary.)

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Science

1. Create a field guide, in booklet or poster form, about foxes, including illustrations.
2. Report orally or in writing about color variations in animals — such as red and black foxes — and what causes this. Does the answer match Uncle Fred's explanation on page 75 of the novel?
3. On pages 60-61 of the novel, Tom imagines he has discovered a new color. Would this be possible? Explain.
4. Tom gets a sick feeling when something terrible is about to happen. What causes this physical feeling?

Language Arts

1. Write a series of newspaper headlines about incidents from a day or a week in your life.
2. Write a physical description of each of the novel's characters. You could also draw a picture of them. (Also Art.)
3. Collect at least 10 metaphors and similes from the novel. Then write 5 or 10 of your own.

Mathematics

1. As the novel opens, Tom is about to put together a \$1.98 Cessna 180 model. How much would a similar model kit cost today? What is the difference in price?
2. Given litters of six cubs each time, what would the population of foxes be after three generations? After four generations? How would you adjust this for the life expectancy of foxes in the wild? (Also Science.)
3. Tom imagines being sent out to milk the cows with a 10-gallon bucket. What would the physical dimensions of a 10-gallon bucket be? How many cows would Tom have

to milk to fill the bucket? How much would the full bucket weigh? (Also Science.)

Social Studies/Geography

1. What indications do you find in the novel that it was written almost 30 years ago? (Also Language Arts.)
2. Given the physical characteristics of the farm and the plants and animals found there, what part of the United States do you think the novel is set in?
3. Plan a one-month bicycle trip somewhere in your state, the United States, or overseas. Show mileages for each day's biking. (Also Math.)

Health

1. Aunt Millie worries that Tom will suffer from heat stroke if he works too hard outdoors during the heat wave. Report orally or in writing on heat stroke — what it is, how to avoid it, and how to treat it.
2. Aunt Millie also worries that Tom will get pneumonia when he comes inside soaking wet and cold. Report orally or in writing on pneumonia — what it is, how to avoid it, and how to treat it.

Art

1. Create a portrait of the midnight fox, or create the artwork "Fox with Baby at Midnight" that Tom imagines seeing on page 145 of the novel.
2. Illustrate some of the scenes in the woods as Tom searches for the fox.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Describe a relationship you have had with an animal, domestic or wild. What did this add to your life?
2. Have you ever dreaded an experience that you couldn't avoid? How did it turn out — as badly as you expected, or not so bad, or pretty good? Describe.
3. Aunt Millie is Tommy's second cousin. Show on a family tree how they are related. Make a family tree of your own showing you and your second cousins.
4. While Tom is waiting to see the midnight fox, he sits perfectly still and makes some interesting discoveries about nature. Do this yourself, and describe in detail what you see after 15 minutes, 30 minutes, and/or 1 hour of close, still observation.
5. Asked by his parents to make a list of his fears, Tom comes up with 4 pages and 38 different fears. Make your own list of fears. Does writing them down make any of them seem less scary? How do you think you might cope with some of these?
6. In a small group, discuss similarities and differences between this novel and any other novels by Betsy Byars you have read.
7. In a small group, discuss similarities and differences between this novel and any other animal-boy/girl novels you have read.

8. For Tom, the first three days on the farm were "the longest, slowest days of my life." Have you ever had days like that? Where were you? What did it feel like? How did you get your days to speed up again?

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Create a scene in which Tom tells his parents or Petie all about his summer on the farm and his experiences with the midnight fox. Be sure Tom's parents or Petie ask questions and make comments as Tom tells his story. (This could be done as a small-group activity and presented as role-play to the class.)
2. Write a description of each of the novel's characters and explain the part each plays in the book.
3. Tell the story of Tom's summer on the farm from the midnight fox's point of view.

OTHER BOOKS BY BETSY BYARS

Rama, the Gypsy Cat (1966)
The Midnight Fox (1968)
Trouble River (1969)
The Summer of the Swans (1970)
The House of Wings (1972)
The 18th Emergency (1973)
The Winged Colt of Casa Mia (1973)
After the Goat Man (1974)
The TV Kid (1976)
The Pinballs (1977)
The Cartoonist (1978)
Good-bye, Chicken Little (1979)
The Night Swimmers (1980)
The Cybil War (1981)
The Animal, the Vegetable, and John D. Jones (1982)
The Two-Thousand-Pound Goldfish (1982)
The Glory Girl (1983)
The Computer Nut (1984)
Cracker Jackson (1985)
The Not-Just-Anybody Family (1986)
The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady (1986)
The Blossoms and the Green Phantom (1987)
A Blossom Promise (1988)
The Burning Questions of Bingo Brown (1988)
Bingo Brown and the Language of Love (1989)
Bingo Brown, Gypsy Lover (1990)
Wanted...Mud Blossom (1991)
Bingo Browns Guide to Romance (1992)
The Moon & I (memoir) (1992)
Coast to Coast (1992)
McMummy (1993)
The Dark Stairs: A Herculeah Jones Mystery (1994)

RELATED READING

Dunlop, Eileen. *Fox Farm*.
George, John and Jean. *Vulpes, the Red Fox*
Haas, Jessie. *The Sixth Sense: And Other Stories*.
Hess, Lilo. *Secrets in the Meadow*
King-Smith, Dick. *The Fox Busters*.
Little, Jean. *Different Dragons*.

McDonnell, Christine. *Just for the Summer*.
North, Sterling. *Little Rascal*.
Paulsen, Gary. *The Winter Room*.
Rylant, Cynthia. *A Blue-Eyed Daisy*.
_____. *Every Living Thing*.
Schnieper, Claudia. *On the Trail of the Fox*.
Seton, Ernest T. *Lives of the Hunted*.

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- de Montreville, Doris, and Donna Hill, eds. *Third Book of Junior Authors*. New York: H.H. Wilson, 1972.
- Horn Book*, February 1969, p. 51.
- Library Journal*, December 15, 1968, p. 4721.
- Robertson, Ina. "Profile: Betsy Byars — Writer for Today's Child." *Language Arts*, March 1980.
- Saturday Review*, November 9, 1968, p. 64.
- Something About the Author*, Vol. 46, pp. 34-47. Detroit: Gale, 1987.
- Something About the Author Autobiography Series*, Vol. 1, pp. 53-68. Detroit: Gale, 1986.

VOCABULARY TEST

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

- _____ 1. If I had to go, I would **loathe** and despise every minute of it.
- _____ 2. Then my father said **earnestly**, "If you go to the farm with the right attitude, Tom, that's the main thing."
- _____ 3. It was a very **dismal** morning going to the farm.
- _____ 4. Instead of the boy, the orphanage sent them a very **puny** girl.
- _____ 5. I was not an enormously **adaptable** person and I did not fit into new situations well.
- _____ 6. This was my one big **dread** — that some night I would have to go swimming with Uncle Fred.
- _____ 7. I would be **wincing** along (I had very sensitive feet).
- _____ 8. The fox **cocked** her head to one side, listening.
- _____ 9. I sat on a rock, perfectly still, for a long time and looked down into the creek.
- _____ 10. "Someone I love is in danger, **grave danger**."
- _____ 11. Uncle Fred unhooked the dog, who ran ahead of us as if to make up for his **laxity**.
- _____ 12. The black fox had watched a moment more — she was not an **impetuous** hunter.
- _____ 13. The only person at the table with any **animation** was Uncle Fred.
- _____ 14. Hazeline was sitting with her chin in her hand, **sullenly** dipping a slice of toast into her coffee and then nibbling at it.
- _____ 15. The fox with her light quick movements could run from this **lumbering** dog all day.
- _____ 16. Uncle Fred had crossed the creek again and moved toward the **thicket** of trees.
- _____ 17. Aunt Millie's spirits seemed greatly improved now that the fox was **doomed**.
- _____ 18. I remained by the tree watching the fox cub, listening for the **quavering** cry that he uttered from time to time.
- _____ 19. In a **frenzy** now that he had heard his mother, the baby fox moved about the cage, pulling at the wire and crying again and again.
- _____ 20. The breeze quickened, and **abruptly** the dishpan which Aunt Millie had left on the porch railing clattered to the floor.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| a. flexible | k. weak |
| b. condemned | l. flinching |
| c. stream | m. trembling |
| d. suddenly | n. hasty |
| e. dense grove | o. hate |
| f. serious | p. liveliness |
| g. in a sulky way | q. seriously |
| h. plodding | r. neglect |
| i. gloomy | s. fear |
| j. tilted | t. wild agitation |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description from the novel. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the blank next to the description number.

- | | |
|------------|-----------------|
| a. Tom | f. Aunt Millie |
| b. Mom | g. Uncle Fred |
| c. Dad | h. Petie Burkis |
| d. the fox | i. Hazeline |
| e. Mikey | j. Happ |

- _____ 1. Every time I so much as tiptoed to the bathroom for a drink of water she would come out of her room and say, "Are you all right?"
- _____ 2. Information just poured out of her and then she would forget it.
- _____ 3. "I still can't believe it!" She had been saying this in a very happy and excited way all week.
- _____ 4. He was hot, dusty, panting.
- _____ 5. He grabbed Hazeline by the arms and made her walk out on this little dock and then he pretended he was going to push her into the water.
- _____ 6. He was going to be a reporter when he grew up, so he was good at doing headlines.
- _____ 7. ...a high-school coach who likes to tell about things like the Lehigh-Central basketball game, when he won the game in the last two seconds with a free throw.
- _____ 8. ...gliding like a cat through the orchard, a small dark noiseless shadow moving between the trees.
- _____ 9. ...a large man, very powerfully built.
- _____ 10. ...didn't control himself too well; used to cry pretty easily if he got hurt or if something was worrying him.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Write **T** in the blank if the statement is true or **F** if any part of the statement is false.

- _____ 1. Tom passes the time on the farm by watching TV.
- _____ 2. While Tom is on the farm, he and Petie keep in touch by talking often to each other on the telephone.
- _____ 3. Hazeline loves to eat; Tom doesn't.
- _____ 4. Tom looks forward to life on the farm, because he loves animals.
- _____ 5. Foxes are very smart.
- _____ 6. Mikey and Hazeline do get married.
- _____ 7. Both the midnight fox and her cub escape and run away.
- _____ 8. Tom loves to try new things and be in new situations.
- _____ 9. The baby fox pretends to be dead when Uncle Fred digs him out of the den.
- _____ 10. Tom's mother is a schoolteacher.

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Choose an ending to complete each statement correctly. Place the letter of your answer in the blank to the left.

- _____ 1. Aunt Millie is really a) Tom's grandmother. b) Tom's great-aunt. c) Tom's second cousin.
d) no relation to Tom.
- _____ 2. Mikey says he will not marry Hazeline until she a) finishes high school. b) gets a job. c) loses twenty pounds.
d) gets a lot older.
- _____ 3. Tom's parents spend their summer vacation a) hiking in the Alps. b) riding bicycles through Europe.
c) riding bicycles through the U.S. West. d) exploring the Smoky Mountains.
- _____ 4. One time, Tom and Petie Burkis figured out the very day Petie would a) die. b) win a Pulitzer Prize.
c) get married. d) get the chicken pox.
- _____ 5. Hazeline is mad at the brides' magazine because a) the dresses are too expensive.
b) the magazine costs too much. c) the dresses are unattractive. d) all the model brides are so thin.
- _____ 6. One day, Tom watches as the fox catches a: a) turkey. b) mouse. c) hen. d) weasel.
- _____ 7. The fox barks as she is being chased because a) she wants to lead Tom away from her den.
b) she's afraid of being caught. c) she wants her cub to know where she is going. d) she's warning other foxes.
- _____ 8. Tom spends weeks walking through the woods looking for a) a red fox. b) the midnight fox's den.
c) the missing turkey eggs. d) the ravine.
- _____ 9. The fox has a) two black cubs. b) three cubs. c) one red and one black cub. d) one cub.
- _____ 10. Aunt Millie says Uncle Fred must kill the fox because a) the fox has killed her turkey.
b) the fox may have rabies. c) she hates all foxes. d) the fox has killed one of her rabbits.
- _____ 11. Tom goes along on the fox hunt with Uncle Fred because a) he hopes to save the fox from being shot.
b) Uncle Fred bullies Tom into it. c) Aunt Millie orders Tom to do it.
d) Tom wants to learn how to track and hunt.
- _____ 12. Which of these characters comes along with Tom and Uncle Fred on the fox hunt? a) Aunt Millie b) Petie
c) Fred Jr. d) Happ
- _____ 13. When Uncle Fred shoots at the fox, he a) kills her. b) misses. c) wounds her. d) kills her baby instead.
- _____ 14. In order to get to the caged-up baby fox, Tom has to a) break the lock on the screen porch door.
b) climb out the cellar window. c) climb out his bedroom window and down a tree.
d) hide in the woods instead of going to bed.
- _____ 15. When Tom tells them he has let the baby fox go, Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred a) are very angry.
b) say it's just fine. c) send Tom home. d) say they'll hunt down the fox and her cub again.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any *three* to answer. Write a paragraph for each.

1. How is Tom different from Bubba and Fred Jr., the boys Aunt Millie raised?
2. Describe the relationship between Hazeline and Mikey.
3. Why is Tom being sent to the farm for the summer? How does he feel about this at the beginning of the summer, and at the end of the summer?
4. Why does Uncle Fred hunt the midnight fox? Why does Tom go along on the hunt?

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character 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.

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| _____ 1. Cries very easily and deserves a vacation. | a. Tom | f. Aunt Millie |
| _____ 2. Goes driving every evening with her boyfriend. | b. Mom | g. Uncle Fred |
| _____ 3. Is Tom's second cousin. | c. Dad | h. Petie Burkis |
| _____ 4. Tells Tom about how important self-control is. | d. the fox | i. Hazeline |
| _____ 5. Changes his mind about marrying his girlfriend. | e. Mikey | j. Happ |
| _____ 6. Is Tom's best friend. | | |
| _____ 7. Believes that animals hate him. | | |
| _____ 8. Bays and chases the barking fox. | | |
| _____ 9. Cares devotedly for her only offspring. | | |
| _____ 10. Knows a lot about foxes and loves to hunt. | | |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Write T in the blank if the statement is true or F if any part of the statement is false.

- _____ 1. Tom doesn't have many chores to do on the farm.
- _____ 2. Hazeline worries about being too fat.
- _____ 3. Tom is afraid of heights.
- _____ 4. There are very few animals in the woods around the farm.
- _____ 5. Black foxes are quite common.
- _____ 6. Tom and Petie once figured out the exact day Petie was going to die.
- _____ 7. Mikey and Hazeline do not get married.
- _____ 8. Hazeline helps Tom save the fox.
- _____ 9. After a while, his summer on the farm seems hazy to Tom and hard to remember exactly.
- _____ 10. Uncle Fred is very angry when he finds out Tom has let the baby fox go.

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Choose an ending to complete each statement correctly. Place the letter of your answer in the blank to the left.

- _____ 1. Bubba and Fred Jr. are a) Tom's brothers. b) first cousins. c) Aunt Millie's sons. d) cousins of Petie Burkis's.
- _____ 2. Tom's father has a job as a a) dentist. b) high school coach. c) high school principal. d) accountant.
- _____ 3. Petie Burkis has a talent for writing a) poetry. b) radio advertisements. c) computer software. d) newspaper headlines.
- _____ 4. Which of these items is NOT in Bubba's old bedroom? a) a shotgun. b) a stuffed squirrel. c) a plastic model airplane. d) 4-H project books.
- _____ 5. When Tom sees the fox for the first time, he is a) thrilled and excited. b) afraid he will get rabies. c) sick with an allergic reaction. d) so terrified, he runs away.
- _____ 6. One day, Tom imagines discovering a new a) planet. b) TV show. c) math formula. d) color.
- _____ 7. Tom worries he will have to join Uncle Fred sometime in this activity that Uncle Fred does every evening a) go hunting. b) go for a run. c) chop wood. d) go for a swim.
- _____ 8. Uncle Fred is a) large and powerfully built. b) tall and quite thin. c) short and chubby. d) large but in poor health.
- _____ 9. Tom records the times he sees the fox a) in his diary. b) in his letters to Petie. c) with marks on his suitcase. d) with notches on his model airplane.
- _____ 10. The fox steals and hides a) chicken eggs. b) turkey eggs. c) turkey feathers. d) the dog's bones.
- _____ 11. When Tom is very upset about something a) his ears burn. b) his nose itches. c) his nose starts to run. d) his head aches.
- _____ 12. When Uncle Fred gets the fox cub back to the house, he a) kills it. b) locks it in a rabbit hutch. c) says Tom may raise it as a pet. d) says Hazeline may make a fur collar out of it.
- _____ 13. When Aunt Millie first sees the baby fox, she calls it a) a sweet little thing. b) a worthless critter. c) a sneaky thief. d) a no-good varmint.
- _____ 14. Uncle Fred sets up a trap for the midnight fox using for bait a) a turkey. b) a hen. c) chicken meat. d) the fox's own cub.
- _____ 15. On the way home from the farm, Tom tells his parents that a) he loved being on the farm. b) he hated being on the farm. c) he never wants to see Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred again. d) he has become quite an athlete.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any *three* to answer. Write a paragraph for each.

1. Describe the relationship between Tom and Uncle Fred.
2. What part does Petie Burkis play in the novel?
3. Write a character sketch of Hazeline or of Aunt Millie.
4. Why does Uncle Fred put the baby fox in a cage? Does this strategy succeed? Why or why not?

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. o | 6. s | 11. r | 16. e |
| 2. q | 7. l | 12. n | 17. b |
| 3. i | 8. j | 13. p | 18. m |
| 4. k | 9. c | 14. g | 19. t |
| 5. a | 10. f | 15. h | 20. d |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. f | 6. h |
| 2. i | 7. c |
| 3. b | 8. d |
| 4. j | 9. g |
| 5. e | 10. a |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 4. a | 7. a | 10. a | 13. b |
| 2. c | 5. a | 8. d | 11. a | 14. c |
| 3. b | 6. b | 9. b | 12. d | 15. b |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary somewhat. Samples follow.

1. Bubba and Fred Jr. were athletic, outdoor types who liked to hunt and participate in 4-H activities. They often went in and out of the house via their bedroom windows and a tree, and they got into lots of mischief. Tom, on the other hand, is very unathletic, a city boy who is afraid of heights and wouldn't dream of crawling out a second-story window. He would never hunt, and he is afraid of animals.
2. They are high school sweethearts who are planning to marry. They seem genuinely fond of each other, although they tease and argue about small things like the question of whether Mikey's dog can really be called smart. They do have a lover's quarrel, when Mikey tells Hazeline he won't marry her until she loses twenty pounds, but they are back together again the very next night, and they get married within the year.
3. Tom's parents are going bicycling in Europe for the summer — Tom's mother's first real vacation — so Aunt Millie has agreed to look after Tom; Tom's mother has wonderful memories of the farm and thinks Tom will love being there. Tom, however, firmly expects to hate, loathe, and despise every minute on the farm, as he's afraid of animals, not very strong to do all the farm chores he expects to be given, is a poor swimmer, and generally has little interest in the outdoors and farm life. At the end of the summer he tells his parents that he loved his stay on the farm, mostly because of his involvement with the midnight fox, and because Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred were so nice and never got mad at him for letting the baby fox loose.
4. Aunt Millie sends Uncle Fred out after the fox because the fox has taken her turkey and will start to wipe out her flock of hens next. Also, Uncle Fred is a skilled hunter and enjoys the chance to do something he loves. Tom goes along in a desperate hope to keep Uncle Fred from finding the fox or her den or to somehow spoil Uncle Fred's aim when he shoots at the fox.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. h |
| 2. i | 7. a |
| 3. f | 8. c |
| 4. c | 9. d |
| 5. e | 10. g |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 4. c | 7. d | 10. b | 13. a |
| 2. b | 5. a | 8. a | 11. c | 14. d |
| 3. d | 6. d | 9. c | 12. b | 15. a |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary somewhat. Samples follow.

1. Although Uncle Fred is a nice man, Tom doesn't feel at ease with him; they can't talk to each other. Tom is very aware of the tremendous physical difference between them — Uncle Fred is large, powerfully built, and Tom is small and unathletic — and also feels that personally they are completely unlike. Uncle Fred treats Tom kindly and doesn't seem to notice Tom's uneasiness about the fox hunt. At the end, after Tom confesses to releasing the baby fox and his uncle doesn't get mad at him, he feels Uncle Fred understands him better than anyone else in the world.
2. Although Petie doesn't share the summer on the farm with Tom, he is ever-present in Tom's thoughts. Tom helps himself adjust to the unfamiliarity of life on the farm by relating his new experiences there to past experiences he has shared with Petie. Petie is a delightful character who adds much humor and amusing everyday nonfarm incidents to the novel.
3. Hazeline is an outgoing, friendly girl who worries about being overweight and whose future plans seem to be focused exclusively on marriage. She is good-humored, loves to eat, and is very helpful to Tom by telling him all about the nature of foxes. Aunt Millie is a well-meaning, warm, motherly type who somehow fails to notice that Tom is not at all like her own two sons; she expects all boys to be mischief-makers, tree-climbers, athletes, and hunters. The long stretch of hot weather makes Millie irritable and fussy, but her good humor returns when the weather breaks. She is very concerned about Tom's well-being, fussing over his eating and sleeping habits.
4. The caged baby fox is to act as bait for the mother fox. Uncle Fred sits on the back porch with his gun that night, waiting for the midnight fox to come in answer to her baby's cries. The strategy succeeds in the sense that the midnight fox does come, but it fails in that Uncle Fred misses when he shoots at the fox, and then a violent thunderstorm breaks, ending Fred's vigil for that night. The strategy still would probably have worked the following night except that Tom breaks the lock and releases the baby fox after Uncle Fred has gone to bed.

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