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SYNOPSIS

Chap. 1: On Tuesday, September 30, 17-year-old Conrad Jarrett has been home from a mental institution for a month. He struggles with depression that saps his energy. With a 1,000-word book report due on Wednesday and tests looming, his mind refuses to think about school. He reflects on months of treatment and recovery.

Chap. 2: Calvin Jarrett, Conrad's father, observes his beautiful, 39-year-old wife Beth. She urges him to scold Conrad for dressing like a bum. Because Cal was orphaned at age 11 and, from age 4, spent his childhood in the Evangelical Home for Orphans and Old People, he questions his ability to be a parent. He wonders why Conrad's friends haven't visited. He considers confiding in Ray Hanley, his partner in tax law. At breakfast, Conrad expects Joe Lazenby to take him to school. Beth is going to play golf. Cal wants Conrad to recover lost weight and urges him to make an appointment with Dr. Berger, a psychiatrist in Evanston.

Chap. 3: Cal has not completed exams from his junior year. Kevin Stillman rags him and makes coarse comments about Jeannine Pratt. Miss Mellon asks Conrad to analyze characters in Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*. She offers Conrad time to finish the book, but he prefers a regular schedule of English, trig, chemistry, the Forester Singers, and swim team. Gail Noonan introduces him to Jeannine. Coach Salan asks about his treatment; Conrad admits to having undergone shock therapy. Salan implies that doctors have damaged his timing and asks for extra practice.

Chap. 4: At lunch, Cal thinks about his 20-year marriage. Beth wants to spend Christmas in London; he prefers staying home with Conrad. She proposes that Conrad join them. Cal regrets that they were in Florida the Christmas before during Conrad's decline. She refuses blame for his attempted suicide. At 3:30, Ray reminds Cal that times are looking up and asks about Conrad. Cal blames no one for the death of his older son, Jordan "Buck" Jarrett.

Chap. 5: Tuesday at 4:00 P. M., Conrad arrives at Berger's office in a shabby part of Chicago. Without enthusiasm, he tells Berger that he left the hospital six weeks ago after eight months of treatment. He blames himself for Buck's drowning while sailing and reports that he has no friends. He chooses to skip practice on Tuesdays and Fridays and come for counseling.

Chap. 6: On Wednesday, which would have been Buck's 19th birthday, Cal wishes he had not fought with Beth over a Christmas vacation. He recalls the death of Arnold Bacon, his mentor, in 1967. After helping him through school, Bacon became a father figure. The relationship had ended abruptly when Cal married Beth.

Chap. 7: At a drugstore in Skokie on Saturday morning, Conrad meets Karen Aldrich, a fellow patient who befriended

him. He has been home since late August; she, since the end of May. Although busy with drama club, she is concerned for him and asks if he sees a psychiatrist. He denies depression. After she leaves, he remembers that he wanted to invite her to a swim meet.

Chap. 8: On Saturday evening, Cal does chores, watches television, and plays tennis with his neighbor, Al Cahill. He worries that Conrad looks tired and promises the family will be together at Christmas. The Jarretts leave for a party, where Beth evades questions about Conrad. Marty Genthe regrets that Conrad doesn't mix with other senior boys. In the car, she rages at Cal for drinking too much and letting people pry. Cal looks in on Conrad, who is sleeping. In bed, Beth drifts away from him.

Chap. 9: Conrad surveys his trig quiz and breaks a pencil point. Nearby, Suzanne Mosely is struggling. After class, she leaves crying. Stillman makes crude remarks about Jeannine and Suzanne. That night, Conrad recalls weeping in math class before Christmas break. He dreams about being trapped in a tunnel. Berger discounts the dream and refuses to give him tranquilizers. He suggests that Conrad drop a course. Conrad tells him about Coach Salan's inappropriate remark.

Chap. 10: A week before Thanksgiving, Conrad overhears Stillman call him a flake. Joe defends Conrad. Salan refuses to take him back if he changes his mind about quitting the team. In the parking lot, Conrad conceals from Joe his departure from the swim team.

Chap. 11: At the office, Ray criticizes Cherry, the secretary. Cal recalls Ray's affair with their former secretary. At lunch, Cal meets Carole Lazenby, who describes Beth's perfectionism. Cal's thoughts return to the July storm when Buck drowned in Lake Michigan. At 6:30 P. M., he tells Beth about lunch with Carole. Beth remarks that Carole stays thin from worry and a bad marriage. Cal and Beth notice that Conrad has been late getting home for the past two weeks. Cal intends to order a car as a Christmas and birthday present. Conrad arrives and reports an A in trig, but conceals that he dropped swim team.

Chap. 12: Conrad enjoys the library, feeding birds, and Christmas shopping. When Joe confronts him for leaving the swim team, he claims it was boring. He recalls the only letter he got at the hospital, which was from Joe. Conrad repeats Stillman's comment about flakes. Conrad and Joe quarrel. To Berger, Conrad explains that his mother is private. Berger presses him to confront his anger. Conrad takes Jeannine to a coffee shop, where they discuss music, books, and school. She thinks Conrad is lucky not to have siblings. He walks home through the snow at peace.

Chap. 13: Tuesday night, Cal and Conrad buy a Christmas tree, their first in five years. Beth returns from a meeting seething that Conrad concealed quitting the team. Cal demands to know where he has been every night. Conrad

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retorts that Beth doesn't care where he is. He quarrels with her and dashes upstairs. Beth accuses Cal of appeasing him and refuses to be manipulated. Conrad apologizes to Cal, but doubts that his mother will stop hating him.

Chap. 14: To escape guilt and remorse, Conrad listens to music. Berger confronts him for suppressing anger. Conrad recalls that his suicide attempt put her in a housecleaning frenzy. He has a revelation about "who can't forgive who" and concludes that Beth loved only his brother and father. Berger reminds him that the body cannot lie.

Chap. 15: On Christmas day, the Jarretts host Beth's parents, Howard and Ellen Butler. Cal presents Conrad the green LeMans. His unreadable response dismays his parents. That night, Cal quarrels with Beth. She accuses Cal of freezing out her parents and expects Cal to stop coddling Conrad. She blames Cal for refusing to go to London.

Chap. 16: In January, Conrad focuses on final exams, exercise, new friends, a job, guitar, books, and girls. He applies for work at the library. To Berger, Conrad says the car is a bribe to make him happy and considers Berger his friend.

Chap. 17: On his birthday, Conrad helps Cal clean the garage. They examine the den wall where the boys wrote dirty words. At lunch, Cal proposes seeing Berger. Conrad declares that Cal is a good father. At Berger's office, Cal regrets missing signals that Conrad was suicidal and fears for his family.

Chap. 18: During exam week, Miss Mellon advises Conrad to relax. He gives Jeannine a ride home. She apologizes for her comment about not having a brother. He feels shame for attempting suicide. At home, Mrs. Lazenby says she misses his visits. He attempts to call Karen, then invites Jeannine for a date.

Chap. 19: At the office, Ray is pleased with a new secretary, Sandra Farentino, and blames Cal for making him fire Cherry. Ray asks Cal what is bothering him. Cal plans to play golf in Dallas in March and stay with Beth's brother's family in Richardson. Ray reports that Beth confided to Nancy how Cal worries over Conrad. Cal recalls how Conrad got lost the past Christmas at the Miami airport and how Howard advised not to leave him alone.

Chap. 20: At 8:30, Conrad arrives at Jeannine's home and answers her mother's personal questions. Even though Jeannine bowls poorly, they have a good time. He holds her hand and kisses her good-night.

Chap. 21: On a quiet Saturday night, Cal tells Beth his plans to go to Dallas March 13-16. He recalls being in Toledo, Spain, a year after Buck died, while Conrad was hospitalized. Cal recognizes that Arnold deserted him and accused Beth of refusing to share. Cal remembers considering an affair with Molly Davis ten years earlier and recalls Beth's comment that she would never forgive a husband who strayed.

Chap. 22: At a swim meet, Conrad watches the team's fourth loss out of five meets. The team complains about the coach's admiration for Buck. Conrad punches Stillman for making a coarse remark about Jeannine. Joe comforts Conrad and admits missing Buck. To punish himself, Conrad abstains from television and music and fears answering the phone.

Chap. 23: Cal sees Conrad asleep on the couch and assures him that fighting is normal boyish behavior. He real-

izes that Beth had made no effort to comfort Conrad.

Chap. 24: On March 13, Beth and Cal leave for Dallas; Conrad stays with his grandparents. At dinner, Ellen badgers him with questions. He takes Jeannine home from work. She despairs that her mother sees Mr. Ferrier, who dated her mother while she was still married. Conrad feels strong while holding Jeannine and kissing her.

Chap. 25: After Beth and her brother Ward return from riding horseback, Cal exults over a good golf score. He recalls the August after Buck died when she cried alone. Neither Beth nor Conrad had wept at the funeral. He thinks about the storm that caused Buck to drown, the recovery of the body two days later, and Conrad's eight months in the hospital.

Chap. 26: On Sunday morning, Ellen grouches about Conrad returning home at 1:30 A. M. He reads about Karen's suicide. He goes to bed at 7:00 P. M. and recalls slicing his left wrist with a razor blade. After 2:00 A. M., he slips away from the house. The police question him. He returns to the house and thinks over Buck's last hours as they clung to the sailboat. He drives to Berger's office for an emergency session.

Chap. 27: Conrad begs for help. He recalls Robbie Clay in B Ward, who set himself on fire. Conrad blames himself for killing Buck. Berger disputes Conrad's reasoning and claims he is trying to become the perfect kid. They share breakfast at Nick's restaurant. Berger assumes that Conrad is upset by Karen's suicide. Conrad returns home; relieved of guilt, he sleeps.

Chap. 28: Cal and Beth relax and discuss his third place in the tournament. She bristles when Cal mentions taking Conrad along on a vacation. At the Captain's Table, Cal drinks too much; later, they argue about Cal's obsession with Conrad. She accuses him of depression the past spring and believes he blames her for Conrad's suicide attempt. Although Ward and Audrey approach, the argument continues. Cal sees Conrad's act as self-directed; she withholds love for Conrad because he punishes her. While Ward soothes Beth, Cal recalls Conrad lying in the bathroom and begging to die. His note read, "I wish I knew why but I just don't."

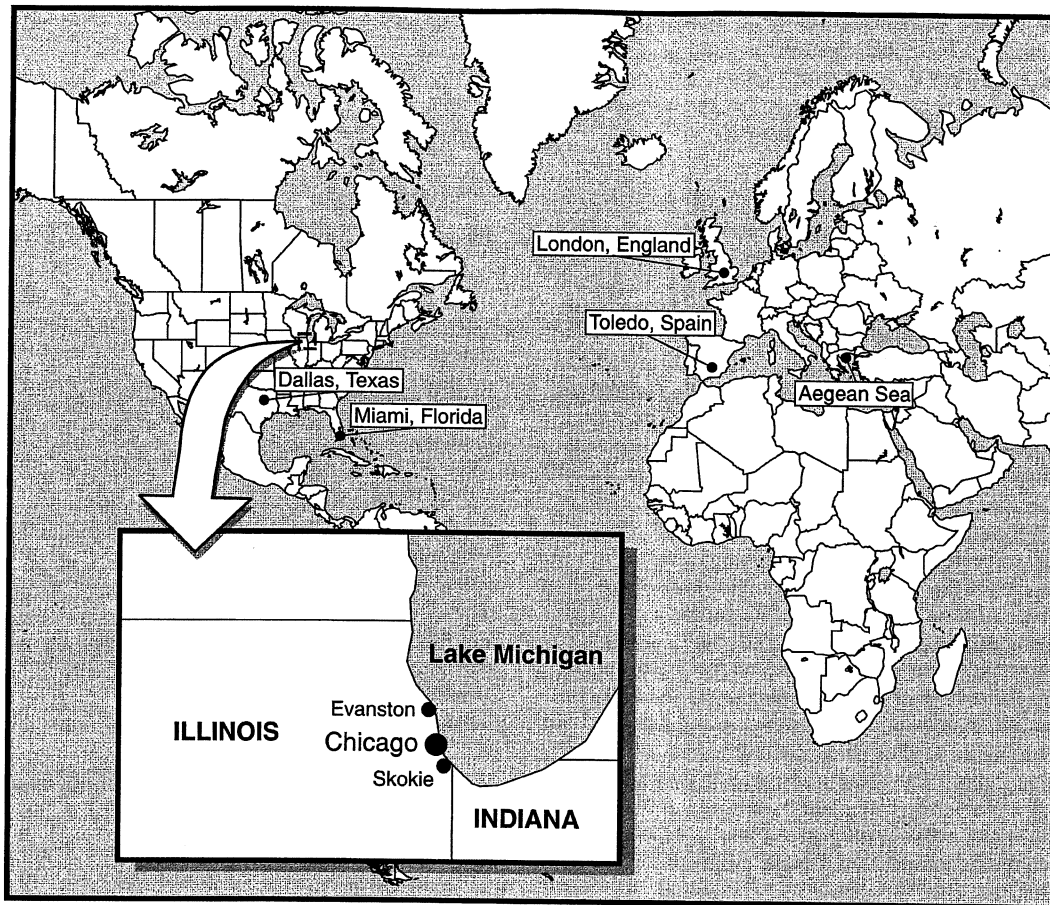
Chap. 29: On the flight home from Dallas, Cal knows that he can't change Beth. The family goes to dinner at Naroff's, where Conrad senses his mother's attention. On the stairs, Conrad says good-night, but conceals his terror of Karen's suicide. He kisses his mother.

Chap. 30: Conrad dreads Jeannine's departure for college. They notate a song he has written. She admits asking Joe about Conrad and reveals that Suzanne has a crush on him. They make love. She confesses that she gave up her virginity after her father left the family. Caressing Jeannine, Conrad feels hope.

Chap. 31: In mid-May, Beth packs to leave Cal because he suggested she see a counselor. Cal explains to Conrad that she is going to Ward's house, then to Europe. Cal is selling the house and taking an apartment. He refuses to blame anyone. He and Conrad hope she will return.

Epilogue: Late in August, Conrad says good-bye to Berger and invites him to visit their house in Evanston. On Lazenby's front porch, Conrad greets Katy, Joe's sister. He will graduate in January. His mother has written from Greece. He learns that she has saved her sons' art work from childhood. He recognizes that love has kept them together just as it keeps them apart.

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TIME LINE

- 1931** Cal is born.
- 1935** Cal goes to live at the Evangelical Home for Orphans and Old People.
- 1942** Cal's mother dies.
- 1952** Cal marries Beth.
- 1953** **Nov. 5** Jordan is born.
- 1955** Conrad is born.
- 1966** Jordan breaks his arm playing football.
- 1967** Arnold Bacon dies.
December Cal and Beth begin celebrating Christmas away from home.
- 1971** **July** Jordan Jarrett drowns in Lake Michigan.
fall Conrad's grades fall.
Christmas The Jarretts go to Florida; Conrad gets lost at the Miami airport.
Dec. 30 Conrad attempts suicide and enters a mental institution.
- 1972** **spring** Cal is depressed and avoids answering phones and reading mail.
May 30 Karen Aldrich returns home from the hospital.
summer Cal and Beth go to Toledo, Spain.
Aug. 30 Conrad returns home from the hospital.
Sept. 30 Conrad struggles with depression.
Oct. 14 Conrad meets Dr. Berger.
Nov. 5 Cal recalls it would have been Jordan's 19th birthday.
Nov. 8 Conrad visits with Karen Aldrich at a drugstore

in Skokie.

week before Thanksgiving Conrad quits the swim team.

Christmas Conrad is less than pleased to receive a LeMans.

1973 **January** Conrad applies for work at the library.

March 13 Beth and Cal depart for Dallas. Conrad stays with his grandparents.

March 15 The police question Conrad as he walks the streets

March 16 On the flight home from Dallas, Cal knows that he can't change Beth.

mid-May Beth leaves. Cal tells Conrad his mother is gone and that he is selling the house.

summer Conrad makes up course work and expects to graduate in January.

late August Conrad says good-bye to Berger and recognizes that love keeps him apart from his mother.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The daughter of businessman Harry Reginald and Marion Aline Nesbit Guest, Judith Ann Guest was born March 29, 1936, in Detroit, Michigan. She began writing at age twelve, but did no professional work while she earned a B. A. degree from the University of Michigan. She and husband Larry, a computer executive, are parents of sons Larry, John, and Richard and live in Edina, Minnesota. Guest wrote for the *Palatine Press* and *Arlington Heights Herald* and taught grade school in Michigan in 1964, 1969, and 1975, the year

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that Viking Press accepted her debut novel, a Book-of-the-Month Club bestseller. Her writing career, bolstered by meetings with a writers' group and teaching stints at the Loft, maintains its focus on human and family relations and includes submissions to *The Writer* and screen versions of *Second Heaven*, *Rachel River*, and *Minnesota*.

CRITIC'S CORNER

An intense perusal of one family's emotional destruction, *Ordinary People* is anything but ordinary. Judith Guest's sensitivity to the hurt and anger beneath the Jarrett family's false patina of respectability results in clear portraits of family members out of sync with each other. Locked in private hells of regret, guilt, and blame, they fail to grieve as a family.

An intuitive beginner, Guest surprised Viking Press in the mid-1970s with the first unsolicited novel they had published since 1949. For skillful psychological drama in a taut emotional family scenario, she received the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize from the University of Rochester. The book immediately sparked discussion among psychologists, school counselors, and educators. Teenagers identified with the main character, a young survivor of a suicide attempt.

The subject of a 1980 Paramount film, the first directed by Robert Redford, *Ordinary People* was the impetus of Mary Tyler Moore's convincing portrayal of an unloving, perfectionist mother whose brittle exterior wards off family emotions. The chemistry between Donald Sutherland and Timothy Hutton as father and son produces a keen examination of a seemingly successful family whose private guilt and griefs belie the surface calm. The movie earned an Oscar for best picture and for the work of Redford, Hutton, and screen adapter Alvin Sargent. Moore and Judd Hirsch, who plays the psychiatrist, were nominated for Oscars. Additional awards from the Directors Guild of America, Golden Globe, Los Angeles Film Critics Association, National Board of Review, New York Film Critics Awards, and Writers Guild of America attest to the quality of Guest's first novel.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss sibling rivalry
2. To describe the physical, mental, and emotional effects of coping with a hostile family environment
3. To characterize the value of counseling and friends
4. To characterize honest communication
5. To discuss the nature of loss and regret
6. To account for verbal clashes
7. To discuss human foibles and talents
8. To account for the dissolution of family
9. To outline different types of manipulation
10. To enumerate examples of menace and hostility

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To outline the interconnected lives of the people who know Conrad
2. To recount how Dr. Berger frees Conrad of anger and guilt
3. To explain how Beth alters her relationship with Cal and Conrad
4. To describe Buck
5. To evaluate changes in Conrad's self-concept
6. To define the role of Conrad's grandparents and his uncle Ward

7. To analyze Conrad's last day with Buck
8. To justify Conrad's evenings of shopping and feeding birds
9. To contrast school, home, and Dr. Berger's office as settings
10. To account for Conrad's despair
11. To study the causes and implications of Conrad's outburst at Beth
12. To contrast the family before and after the Jarretts' separation

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

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

characterization the creation of full-fledged human motivation, behavior, and response in fictional people. Significant to Guest's novel is the interplay of a family of four reduced to three, then two. Beth, the well-groomed, rigid perfectionist, combats with silence and rage her husband's dutiful parenting. On the brink of manhood, Conrad, the only surviving child, avoids his cold, vengeful mother and his father's overprotection while battling guilt that he survived a sailing accident, but his older brother Jordan drowned. Against the intense character evasions, role-playing, and confrontations are the comments of Cal's in-laws, Jeannine, Joe Lazenby, Coach Salan, Karen Aldrich, and Dr. Berger, the eccentric, savvy psychiatrist who sheds light when interaction produces pain and revelation.

dream vision an imaginative, impressionistic literary motif or framework through which the author presents a dreamscape. By escaping the hard edges of reality, Guest probes regret, shame, terror, and subconscious longing to add depth to character studies of Conrad and Cal. Concentrating on their unspoken antagonisms, self-doubt, and nightmares, she sets up the plot to maintain the two as a family, while distancing Beth farther from the circle of empathy that binds father to son. Without expressing her own misgivings and personal quandaries, Beth becomes the missing quantity, the X factor who remains a puzzle as she fades from Conrad and Cal's lives.

setting the place where and when action occurs. The novel's locales alter from family enclave to office, school, hospital, team pool and locker room, library, grandparents' home, streets, cafe and restaurant, and vacation getaway as action moves about Chicago and Evanston, south to Dallas, and, in limited glimpses, to Florida; Toledo, Spain; and the Aegean Sea. Within the Jarrett residence, Conrad modulates his behavior, depending on who is home and where he encounters adults. In his room, he withdraws into brooding and mental torment as he tries to maintain composure. When the story reaches the final impasse, Cal has sold the house and moved with his son to Evanston, Beth remains apart and corresponds through letters, and Conrad has terminated his weekly visits to Dr. Berger's scruffy office in the bad part of Chicago. Stronger, more sensitive to self and others, Conrad returns to the familiar residence of his old friend, Joe Lazenby, to say goodbye. The choice of a family setting suggests that Conrad is once more at home among the vicissitudes of normal home life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The settings in *Ordinary People* maintain the allusion of the ordinary. The Jarretts live well in the upper Midwest.

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Their lives include Cal's prestigious office, country clubs, dinner at restaurants, expensive vacations, golf tournaments, horseback riding, sailing on Lake Michigan, and psychotherapy for Conrad in Chicago. The irony of the "good life" is the fallout from the drowning of Buck during a summer storm over the lake. In disjointed pieces, the image of terror as the boys cling to the boat hull takes shape, contrasting the seeming order of daily lives with the disorder of Buck's death. Beth's inability to weep at the funeral and her perpetual whirl of tennis games and family vacations imply that life at home is unbearable. In contrast, Conrad's escape from swim team and his tense performance in English class indicate that he is more capable of coping when he is alone in his room or talking with friends. Cal, too, is more content at home and joins Conrad in decorating a Christmas tree, a symbol of unity and celebration.

It is significant that Beth and Cal go through the motions of normalcy at home, then acknowledge their dissonances when they are away from the house. While Beth slips away from Cal in bed and ignores Conrad sleeping on the couch, she is more likely to reveal her disdain and bitterness in more neutral territory. On the car ride home from a dinner party, she actively engages Cal in a vitriolic exchange concerning prying partygoers and Cal's overconsumption of alcohol. At her brother's home in Dallas, she vents her mounting tensions and blames Cal for coddling their surviving son and allowing him to manipulate their feelings and behaviors. In the airplane from Dallas, Cal realizes that his wife has displayed controlling behavior from the beginning of their marriage over two decades past.

When Beth has effectively dissolved her marriage by fleeing to the Aegean, she seems more at ease and sends letters as a means of communicating with Conrad. Her feeble attempt at tender motherhood by treasuring childhood artwork is typical of her style of parenting. Safely apart from real interaction, she can measure out brief glimpses of love from the past without actually talking to Conrad in the present or admitting that she loves him. Fortunately for Conrad, his visits to Dr. Berger prepared him to recognize familial love in this meager form. Intent on his relationship with Cal, Conrad functions well in their new environment away from the picture-perfect home in which they endured such hell.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about Judith Guest, values, depression, the film version of the novel, family counseling, perfectionism, Chicago, suicide, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

Acting on Your Values, Rosen Publishing Group
Adolescent Suicide, American Psychological Association
After a Suicide, Putnam
Counseling, Vocational Biographies, Inc.
The Delinquency of a Minor, Social Studies School Service
Depression Workbook, New Harbinger
Grief Recovery Handbook, HarperCollins
Helping Children Grieve, Augsburg Fortress
"Illinois" (map), American Automobile Association
Juvenile Justice, Social Studies School Service
Ordinary People (audiocassette), Recorded Books
Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good?, Free Spirit
Undoing Depression, Little, Brown & Co.

Also, consult these websites:

"Children and Grief," <http://www.psych.med.umich.edu/web/aacap/factsFam/grief.htm>.
"Crisis, Grief, and Healing," <http://www.webhealing.com>.
"Depression Homepage," <http://www.depression.com>.
"Preventing Teen Suicide," <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/kill2.htm>.

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Judith Guest's *Ordinary People* should include these aspects:

Themes

- death
- grief
- remorse
- guilt
- hostility
- friendship
- conflict
- reunion
- family
- failure
- separation

Motifs

- post-traumatic fallout
- asserting control over family and daily life
- reshaping daily events to express a changed outlook
- grasping at love and forgiveness
- turning to alcohol for escape
- recovering from institutionalization
- reconciling an inevitable separation

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers allow you to reread the passage from which the item is taken.

1. The May fly has a life-span of eighteen hours. It spends that entire time laying eggs for the next generation. May flies, the narrator explained, know that's the answer. Because they never even have to ask the question. Nice for the May flies. (Chap. 1, pp. 4-5)
(In his confused reflection, Conrad contrasts his complex probings to the simple life span of the May fly. His own intense introspection begins to overwhelm him. He is concerned about where he is going, "From what? Toward what?" Self-control, self-identification, and an ordered life have become his major goals. Overall, he considers himself extraordinary in an abnormal sort of way. His mind obsesses over the need to be ordinary again.)
2. He should go back inside; get a heavier [jacket], but he doesn't want to risk it. The hurdle has been jumped once today. Enough. (Chap. 3, p. 14)
(Conrad draws on an athletic metaphor to characterize his relationship with his mother. Though their love exists, it is layered over with strain and tension, which becomes a daily obstacle for Conrad to surmount. His feelings that result from misunderstandings and undefined emotion restrict daily contact to a superficial level, like characters on a stage. The longer these barriers exist, the more meaningless and shallow grows daily interaction with Beth.)

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3. Nothing but placebos here. Use 'em myself for quick energy sometimes. Just sugar. (Chap. 5, p. 39)
(Dr. Berger refers to a pill or tablet composed of a harmless, inactive substance. Without medicinal value, the dosage merely soothes a patient's emotional need for medication. The fact that the psychiatrist has no medicine available for patients indicates his straightforward technique, which apparently rejects chemical therapy. His philosophy of counseling seems to be based on frank, candid relationships with patients and goals centered on truth.)
4. I'm the kind of man who—hasn't the least idea what kind of man I am. (Chap. 6, p. 51)
(Cal's introspection concludes that he is full of doubt. His inability to accept Buck's tragic drowning and Conrad's attempted suicide suggests that he is accustomed to an ordered, uncluttered, manageable family existence. Though mature and successful at law, he has become diffident from strained relations with Beth and Conrad. He needs reassurance that his life has meaning)
5. And he had to admit it, he liked a clean house; he liked the order she brought into his life, perfectionist that she was. (Chap. 11, p. 90)
(Cal recognizes a major cause of friction and alienation in his marriage—Beth's demand for control. She satisfies the drive for perfectionism by setting extremely high standards and being displeased by anything less. She is unusually successful when meeting her abnormally idealistic criteria. However, disharmony occurs when she imposes these criteria upon other people who lack the ability or will to perform.)
6. Kiddo, you got any idea how much energy it takes to hold the door closed like you do? That's power. (Chap. 12, p. 100)
(With a metaphor, Berger epitomizes to Conrad the onus of suppressing anxiety, guilt, and self-disapproval. It takes less energy to deal with problems than it does to bottle up fear, to avoid potential conflict, and to dwell on the loss of self-esteem.)
7. So, can there be no communication without contamination? (Chap. 23, p. 187)
(Cal defines communication as something that ironically separates people more than it unites them. For the Jarretts, communication no longer exists as sharing. Too often, it turns into directions and commands, giving advice, or even imposing one's beliefs on another. The programmed promotions of advertising, follow-the-leader, and other stereotyped formulas on how to live one's life now build walls rather than bridge distances.)
8. And another truth. That there are no secret passages to strength, no magic words. It is just something you know about yourself. (Chap. 26, p. 210)
(Conrad begins to internalize Dr. Berger's counseling and realizes inner strength that has lain dormant during his months of self-castigation and remorse. Thus, healing comes from character and self-analysis, not from drugs, hospitalization, or shock therapy.)
9. Geez, if I could get through to you, kiddo, that depression is not sobbing and crying and giving vent, it is plain and simple reduction of feeling. (Chap. 27, p. 225)
(Guest speaks through Berger her message that the lay-

man's definition of depression is false. Unlike melancholy or dejection, depression dampers feeling, shutting off access to the self and to others.)

10. Circles and more circles, where does it end? How can it end? (Chap. 28, p. 240)
(Conrad realizes that the Jarrett family is caught in a cycle of love, emotion, guilt, and misperceived motives. They maintain distance to keep a tenuous peace. The distancing reveals the seriousness of their dysfunction as a family. They misinterpret understanding as appeasement and gifts as bribes. Serious discussion results in barbs, blow-ups, and accusations as they try to restore order. The false facade of ordinary exchanges results in confusion.)

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 novel.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. How does Conrad conceal his agitation?
(On return from eight months of hospitalization following attempted suicide, Conrad gives the outward appearance of a cure and of recovery from the loss of his only brother, who drowned in a storm on Lake Michigan while sailing with Conrad. On return to school, Conrad notes sarcastically, "Everything's okay, he's here, wearing his jeans, boots, and jersey shirt, just like everybody else, all cured, nobody panic." He fails to realize that such false actions and posturing before classmates make it worse for himself and those he interacts with. The more he pretends to be healed, the more his family, teachers, and friends expect from him. As long as he continues his charade, he can't expect anyone to respond appropriately to his inner torment.)
2. What does Beth's tennis playing reveal about her emotions?
(Beth maintains a round of tennis tournaments, interspersed with golf matches, partying, and horseback riding. She excels in sports to such a degree that she needs competition that only men can give. To her disadvantage, she applies her philosophy to everyday life and social events. She believes in competition and game-playing to its fullest degree, particularly in conversation, argument, and home management. Whether she is interacting with husband, sons, parents, brother, friends, or material possessions, such as kitchen appliances or a Christmas tree, she cannot accept second best and bristles at any weakness or compromise, such as Cal's inability to keep dinner guests from prying into the family's personal problems. Like a good game of tennis, she needs to keep the volley light and moving, never stopping too long in one spot to reveal the emotional bankruptcy she conceals with her nonstop life.)
3. What is Dr. Tyrone Berger's role in the novel?
(As consulting psychiatrist, Berger enters the action a year after Buck's death and eight months after Conrad's attempted suicide and hospitalization. As a means of lessening the distance with his patient, Berger is outwardly frumpy and disorganized in his office on the bad side of Chicago, but his looks veil an intelligent, percep-

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tive mind that consistently identifies Conrad's faulty logic. Berger intends to be Conrad's friend. He rejects passive listening to become the catalyst impelling Conrad to mental and emotional self-discovery. When Conrad reaches a late-night crisis, Berger willingly accepts a spur-of-the-moment appointment and solaces the boy with wise advice and an early breakfast.)

4. Why is Conrad wary of psychiatry?

(Conrad's experience with doctors, institutions, and other mental patients has been harrowing. Having spent months in an asylum and undergone electroshock treatment, he recognizes the high stakes of trust and too much expectation of a cure. He has seen one patient set himself on fire and read about a supposedly cured patient gassing herself with carbon monoxide. His experiences cause him to devalue doctors as incompetents. With Berger, Conrad looks for fake smiles, shallow expressions of concern, and leading questions. When Berger fails to fit the stereotype, Conrad begins to trust him and eventually accepts him as a friend.)

5. How does Conrad express his insecurity?

(In Chapter 1, Conrad's tenuous return to morning routine raises questions in his mind. Early in the morning, he asks impersonal questions, as though referring to a third party: "Brush his teeth first? Wash his face? What pants should he wear? What shirt? The small seed of despair cracks open and sends experimental tendrils upward to the fragile skin of calm holding him together. "Are You on the Right Road?" The question of direction refers to his mental state. He must determine his identity and purpose after the serious shocks he has endured. The overload of minute details leads him to a tentative conclusion about his return from the hospital—that he must allow "a couple of bad days now and then.")

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Why does Arnold Bacon's mentoring return to Cal's questioning mind?

(In the aftermath of his son Buck's death and Conrad's attempted suicide and hospitalization, Cal recalls a line from his professor and mentor, Arnold Bacon, who said, "The things which hurt instruct—Benjamin Franklin." In distress, Cal concludes that the statement is only partially applicable to his quandary. At this incomplete stage of coping with tragedy, he believes, "The things which hurt don't always instruct. Sometimes they merely hurt." Still in the preliminaries of adjustment, he feels more pain than enlightenment and must endure a great deal more suffering before he understands how seriously his family must change to readjust.)

7. Why do Beth and Conrad exchange hurtful accusations?

(In Chapter 13, a deceptively homey atmosphere surrounds the purchase of a tall spruce to be decorated for a Christmas at home. Conrad and Cal enjoy a serene evening together until Beth arrives. In a rage that he has quit swim team and deceived them by staying away from home for over a month, she lambastes him for trickery. Caught off guard, Conrad lashes back, urging his mother to go to Europe. He accuses her in crude terms: "The only reason you give a fuck about it is because someone else knew about it first!" Still grieving that she didn't visit him in the hospital, he surmises that she preferred vacationing in Spain and Portugal to consoling him. The obvi-

ous cause of the blow-up is the long period in which the two have brooded over their individual hurts and blamed the other without trying to ameliorate the situation.)

8. What is Buck's role in the novel?

(Although Buck is dead before the novel opens, his memory influences each anguished member of the Jarrett family. Conrad remembers him as the older, heroic brother. Whatever Conrad wasn't, Buck was. Conrad feels compelled to take his brother's place, but is unable to give up his own personality to assume Buck's part in the family. Because Buck was his mother's favorite, Beth can't cope with his loss and silently blames Conrad for the drowning. She buries her hostility so deep that she can no longer love Conrad. For Cal, the loss of a son triggers multiple self-evaluations. He misses Buck, grieves for Conrad, and stands helplessly by as his family implodes.)

Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. Why does Beth fail to communicate with Cal?

(Beth withdraws spiritually, emotionally, and physically from Cal. In bed, she moves out of his reach. During plans for the future and discussions, she remains inflexible and uncommunicative. Because perfectionism, self-pity, and emotion run rampant, she avoids any admission that will leave her vulnerable or open to criticism. Fearing a loss of control of her home, husband, and son, she retreats into icy, unfeeling, and uncaring behaviors. To relieve anxiety, she attempts to stay busy, socialize with friends, travel during Christmas, and avoid true communication by keeping the household tone and operation on a superficial level. Her self-sustaining fortress drives her husband farther from her and sets him to questioning her behavior from the beginning of their relationship and the reasons they married. On the flight home from Dallas, he admits to himself that she will never change.)

10. What does the novel say about recovery?

(The family's failed attempts at recovery prove that dishonesty or submerged emotion are faulty methods of accommodating loss and grief. As interpersonal relations break down, Conrad and Cal recognize that something is lacking in their response to Buck's death. By the time that counseling begins to help Conrad, Beth is so removed from him that she must withdraw into sports, travel, and socializing and ultimately into separation. Guest implies that the family can heal only at the expense of unity. Apart, each member is capable of finding a coping method. Unfortunately for Cal and Conrad, Beth's mental stability requires an end to the family dissonance and permanent withdrawal from her marriage.)

Questions 11 and 12 Creative Level

11. In a descriptive theme, summarize Beth's faults as a wife and mother, particularly selfishness, vanity, social climbing, and lack of empathy. Explain how she can improve her parental technique and help Conrad develop into a responsible adult, even while she lives apart from her son. Contrast her shortcomings with Cal's strengths, such as warmth, concern, affection, appeasement, and even temperament.

12. Outline the effect of separation and alienation on Cal. Show how Beth's departure destroys his family and com-

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promises their marriage. Comment on the importance of success at tax law, possessions, home, friends, activities, affection, and sex to his sense of self-worth.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art

1. With a group, create a series of illustrations to accompany a classroom volume of British literature. Focus on works mentioned in *Ordinary People*.
2. Using desktop publishing or other media, design contrasting murals, web sites, collages, or posters to demonstrate these pairs: clinging to a sailboat hull and playing in a golf tournament, working at a bakery and in an eighth-floor law office, applying for work at the library and attending a swim meet, striking Stillman on the nose and kissing Beth good-night, comforting Jeannine and arguing with Dr. Berger, and breaking a pencil point and getting lost in Miami airport.
3. Create a bulletin board illustrating these settings: locker room, English class, Conrad's bedroom, Berger's office, Jeannine's living room, Ward's house, plane from Dallas, hospital, grandmother's house, sailboat, and the waters of Lake Michigan.

Cinema

View various films about difficult moments for adolescents. Discuss why filmmakers focus on problems with coming of age.

Drama and Speech

1. Compose a short speech in which you describe Robbie Clay and Karen's suicidal behavior. Give evidence of their pain. Contrast their emotional turmoil to that of Jeannine, Cal, Beth, and Conrad.
2. Outline the effects of loneliness, insecurity, disillusion with family, fear, manipulation, and regret on characters in the story. How do characters compensate for loss? Why does Beth's departure lessen dramatic tension?
3. Apply a Freytag diagram to the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Why does this clear delineation of action lend itself well to radio, audio cassette, or the stage? What problems would a producer have in staging *Ordinary People* as an opera, TV miniseries, or outdoor musical drama?
4. Role-play the part of a principal, librarian, legal secretary, doctor, police officer, reporter, mortician, car dealer, coach, employer, grief counselor, hospital orderly, airline stewardess, waiter, or family friend. Explain how the story would change if Buck had survived the storm on Lake Michigan, Conrad had succeeded at committing suicide, or Beth had returned to Cal.
5. Dramatize in a short skit a conversation: Conrad asking Joe for a ride to school, Ray interviewing Sandra Farantino, Nancy telephoning her parents about her separation from Ray, Dr. Crawford speaking to Dr. Berger about Conrad's mental state, Leo's report to the staff on Robbie's burns, police questioning Karen's mother about her daughter's suicide, Buck and Conrad discussing how to survive the storm on Lake Michigan, Coach Salan's advice to slow swimmers, and Jeannine Pratt's angry confrontation with her mother about Mr. Ferrier.

Education

1. Describe aloud ways that coaches, principles, coun-

selors, librarians, choir directors, and teachers can aid students who have undergone personal tragedy and turmoil, such as encouraging personal response to lessons, writing "relax" on the board during an English literature exam, giving singers or swimmers opportunities to express themselves in music or sports, warning parents of a sharp drop in attendance or grades, suggesting ways of channeling suppressed anger, or asking if students need more time to complete their work.

Journalism

1. Outline how you would investigate a fist fight, drowning, suicide, or attempted suicide. Make a list of questions to ask the parents, Conrad, Beth's parents, school friends, Robbie Clay's family, Karen Aldrich's mother, hospital personnel, visitors, and people who saw Conrad and Buck on the day of the drowning or who observed Conrad shortly before he slashed his wrists. Comment on Howard's warning and on Conrad's low grades, nail biting, insomnia, nightmares, weeping, and getting lost in the Miami airport.
2. Compose a series of feature stories on the physical and emotional causes, symptoms, and control of depression. Emphasize modern methods of preventing, detecting, and controlling mental problems, e. g., lessening daily stress, relying on family, group therapy, sleep, exercise, analysis, electroshock treatment, hospitalization, and medication.
3. Outline appropriate, courteous methods of interviewing family members about griefs and troubles, for instance, death, suicide, psychiatric treatment, business failure, public arguments, adultery, separation, and divorce.

Language Arts

1. Lead a discussion of the title. Comment on Judith Guest's choice of "ordinary" to describe the Jarretts. List ways in which the family is not ordinary.
2. With a group, list and explain terms that express these concepts: paranoia, high achiever, search for identity, depression episodes, illusion or reality, manipulation, disillusion, patronizing, panacea, shock, O. D., tranquilizer, placebo, carbon monoxide poisoning, hostility, low self-image, self-possession, contempt, inferiority complex, circular thinking, censoring voices, delusions of grandeur, irrationality, perfectionism, despair, stereotypes, personal analysis, and psychiatry.

Law

1. Using Conrad and Jeannine as examples, lead a debate about the causes and manifestation of juvenile delinquency. Cite early evidence that Conrad and his friends dislike Kevin Stillman's crude remarks. Comment on indulgence in drugs, misbehavior, rage, and masturbation. Note the parallel between their families' dissolution. Account for questions from the police as Conrad walks the streets at 2:00 A. M.
2. Write a theme in which you summarize laws in your state governing attempted suicide, fistfights, drowning, boat accidents, suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning, separation, divorce, adultery, and commitment to a mental institution.

Literature

1. Explain to a small group obvious and subtle changes in Cal. Discuss how he begins isolating hostility, rage, and

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fear in Beth's behavior. Describe his doubts about his upbringing, his mother's rejection, uncertainty in his law practice, the loss of Arnold Bacon's friendship, and an ongoing attempt to understand Conrad's mood swings. Explain why Ray's questions and comments spur Cal to seek counseling from Dr. Berger.

2. Create a bulletin board illustrating the stages in Conrad's deterioration—from single sibling to mourner, victim of depression, failed suicide, hospital patient, friend of other patients, and returning high school student, choir member, and team swimmer. Cite the approximate date of each stage. Include a section predicting his graduation from high school and entry into college.
3. Compose a web site introducing young readers to other works about mental and emotional disturbance.
4. Compose an extended definition of parent. Select different examples from the book, particularly Jeannine's divorced parents, Ward and Audrey Butler, Howard and Ellen Butler, the Lazenbys, Hanleys, and Jarretts. Comment on the childhood events that denied Cal a normal home, but brought him to the attention of a benefactor and father figure. Account for Jeannine's frustration that Mr. Ferrier dated her mother while she was still married.

Logic and Mathematics

1. Compose a short report proving Conrad's normality. Cite examples of his ability to love his parents, greet adults, honor his grandparents, interact with friends, make decisions, date, drive, travel, celebrate holidays, apply for a job, dress appropriately, study, participate in athletics, play the guitar, listen to music, fight, and accept the judgment of a psychiatrist.
2. Using computer graphics, display suicide figures for teens and adults. Focus on breakdowns by race, area of the country, time of the year, and method of causing death. Explain how some suicides, such as falls, shooting mishaps, and automobile accidents, can go unreported.

Psychology

1. Outline a bulletin board of web sites on these events in the history of psychology: Franz Mesmer's use of hypnosis, Carl Rogers's nondirective psychological analysis, Karen Horney's therapy, Karl Jung's counseling methods, Kurt Lewin's personality paradigm, and Sigmund Freud's *The Problem of Anxiety* explaining how regression relieves stress.
2. Explain to a small group the need for counseling for the Jarrett family. Suggest questions that need answers: why Beth is devoid of emotion, why Cal feels inadequate, how and when Conrad chooses to kill himself, what activities could reunite the family, what kind of discipline is appropriate for Conrad, how holidays and family milestones should be celebrated, and what role in-laws should play in easing the pain of losing Buck.
3. Compose an extended definition of friend. What qualities make Jeannine and Joe worthy friends? When does Conrad turn to Dr. Berger for support and advice?
4. Explain a chart, web site, or poster on the theme of the nuclear and extended families. Give reasons why school friend stops communicating with Conrad after his return from a mental institution. Comment on Ward and Audrey's advice during the Jarretts' marital spat, Ellen Butler's

questions, Howard Butler's concern for Conrad, and Cal's monitoring of Conrad's weight.

5. Draw a flow chart displaying the effects of trauma or emotional distress on driving, studying, school performance, work, responsibilities, trust, loyalty, love, entertainment, drinking, athletics, conversation, sex, and family life.

Social Studies and Geography

1. Create a geographic commentary to accompany an outline of the Jarrett family's movements. Account for significant details, particularly a winter vacation in Toledo, Spain, golf tournament in Dallas, letter from the Aegean, confusion in a Miami airport, and death on Lake Michigan. Discuss the dual concepts of physical and psychological distancing.
2. Create a bulletin board contrasting settings described or mentioned in the text.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Make an oral report on the theme of family disruption. Study the time period between Conrad's return from the hospital to Beth's departure for Greece. Note chronologically how and why the family falls apart. Discuss major and minor events such as arguments, coldness, accusations, rage, manipulation, lies, evasions, disappointment, and deception. Explain why Cal is angry that Beth could go to bed and ignore Conrad asleep on the couch.
2. Analyze the growth of Conrad's trust and friendship with Dr. Berger. Begin with Conrad's disdain for office visits and refusal to cooperate with painful questions. Continue to his leaving of a man he considers a trusted friend.
3. Describe in a short speech the significance of one of these quotations: "I shouldn't have blown up," "You haven't been very friendly, lately," "I don't really believe in psychiatrists," "You don't think I'll do anything crazy?," "You are the one who's changed!," "I want to die," "I'm not—you know—a virgin," "You seemed so down," "The justice, obviously, is for the not-so-perfect kid to become that other, perfect kid," "God, I am sick of talking, talking, talking about *him!*," and "I've known you for over twenty years, you think I can't tell when something's wrong?"
4. Write a scene in which Beth returns to visit Cal and Conrad and to learn how they are managing and how Conrad is making up his course work and anticipating college. Include questions about the end of Cal and Conrad's sessions with Dr. Berger and the sale of the house.
5. Discuss methods by which a deeply depressed teenager can be restored to normality. Suggest ways that Conrad's parents and grandparents might relieve his guilt and regret. What steps might assist him to sleep better? How could his old friends and teachers support him as he makes a new start in classes, choir, and swim team? What kinds of jobs and hobbies might build on his love of music?
6. Pantomime the individual personality traits and behaviors that distance Cal, Conrad, and Beth. Include skits that play Kevin's discourtesy against the friendliness and concern of Joe, Phil, Dick, and Don. Add encounters with Jeannine, Karen, and Suzanne.
7. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of a crucial scene. Include a list of characters, props, music, make-

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up, costumes, and lighting necessary to the scene.

8. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram illustrating how Buck's drowning forces the Jarrett family to reexamine their relationships and objectives. Focus on Christmases spent away from home, discipline, leaving Conrad to dine on TV dinners, open hostility, and displays of affection.
9. Draw a Venn diagram contrasting lifestyles and activities of the Lazenbys, Hanleys, and Jarretts. Include work, school, parent-child interaction, marital relations, disappointments, losses, and failures.
10. Explain briefly these images: Conrad's surprise that a stranger admires his looks, Jeannine helping Conrad write musical notation, Beth riding horseback with Ward, Ellen looking at the clock at 1:30 A. M., Ray firing Chery, Cal having lunch with Carole, Conrad driving his LeMans on Christmas day, Buck returning home with a broken arm, Conrad tossing his TV dinner down the disposer, Kevin calling Conrad a flake, and Beth sitting aloof from Cal on the plane ride from Dallas.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of nightmares, fear, insecurity, intimidation, loyalty, poor judgment, and manipulation during the months after Buck dies.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate why an uneasy peace may cause more harm than good.
3. Compose a scene in which Beth returns for a visit.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Conrad's insecurity, Beth's brittleness, Cal's self-doubt, Dr. Berger's relaxed style, the coach's self-interest, Ellen's smothering love, and Jeannine's vulnerability.
5. Account for the popularity of a book about a failed family.

GUEST'S OTHER WORKS

Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within, 1986 (Foreword)

The Mythic Family: An Essay, 1988

Killing Time in St. Cloud, 1988 (with Rebecca Hill)

Errands, 1997

RELATED READING

James Agee, *A Death in the Family*

Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Joseph Conrad, "The Lagoon"

Caroline Cooney, *The Face on the Milk Carton*

Robert Cormier, *After the First Death, I Am the Cheese, Fade*, and *The Chocolate War*

Kettie Frings's play *Look Homeward, Angel*

Joanne Greenberg, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*

Bette Greene, *Summer of My German Soldier*

Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*

Robert Heinlein, *Citizen of the Galaxy, Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*, and *Starship Troopers*

M. E. Kerr, *Gentlehands*

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Amy Lowell, "Patterns"

Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

Katherine Mansfield, "Miss Brill"

John Neufeld, *Lisa Bright and Dark*

Scott O'Dell, *Sarah Bishop*

Susan Pfeffer, *The Year Without Michael*

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Edward Arlington Robinson, "Richard Cory"

J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

Larry Segriff, *Spacer Dreams*

Charles Sheffield and Jerry Pournelle, *Higher Education*

Paul Zindel, *The Pigman* and *The Pigman's Legacy*

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Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher, "Review," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1982.

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Maddocks, Melvin, "Review," *Time*, July 19, 1976, p. 68.

McHugh, J. J., "Review," *America*, August 21, 1976, p. 81.

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Prescott, Peter S., "Review," *Newsweek*, Oct. 4, 1982.

"Review," *Choice*, October 1976, p. 322.

"Review," *New Yorker*, July 18, 1976, p. 14.

"Review," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Autumn 1976, p. 132.

Rosen, Norma, "Review," *New York Times Book Review*, Oct. 3, 1982.

Tyler, Anne, "Review," *Detroit News*, Sept. 26, 1982.

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VOCABULARY TEST

Replace each underlined synonym with an appropriate word from the list below. Place your answer in the blank provided.

a cappella	contempt	lecherously	perspective	spastic
affliction	décor	manipulated	placebos	surpassed
alienation	furtive	mentor	quick	temperament
anxiety	impedimenta	mogul	racquet	tendrils
appraisingly	inundated	panacea	serene	Valium
benefactors	justice	patronizing	sluice	vapid

1. Concern _____ is blue; failure, gray.
2. Unaccompanied _____ Choir, selection by audition only.
3. Somebody was after drugs, I guess. Nothing but substitutes _____ here.
4. Bacon took him on; decided to be his teacher _____.
5. Stay calm, stay calm, this is not a convulsive _____ leap.
6. I will not be managed _____ by Con.
7. I do not believe in psychiatry as a cure-all _____ for everybody.
8. The briefcase bulged with baggage _____ that spewed forth everywhere.
9. Berger had grinned leeringly _____ at him over a sugar donut.
10. The small boy sits, glancing over at him judgmentally _____.
11. He has a sly _____ look.
12. He stands very still, letting water course _____ over his shoulders.
13. Suddenly he is overwhelmed _____ with Howardisms.
14. Despair sends experimental strands _____ upward to his fragile skin.
15. The home was financed by religious donors _____.
16. The man gives Cal a faintly condescending _____ smile.
17. Viewpoint _____, kiddo, remember?
18. That is not communication. That is separation _____.
19. Nor do you overlook the full bottle of tranquilizers _____ beside the razor blades.
20. He looks as his fingernails, bitten to the nerves _____ again.
21. Ward Butler is big and loud, nothing like his sister, in looks or mood _____.
22. The fairness _____, obviously, is for the not-so-perfect kid to become that other, perfect kid
23. All four of them are beautiful children, having outdone _____ their models.
24. Questions without answers. Undermining. A serious problem _____.
25. If it was up to him, he would give him everything—sun and moon, eternal happiness, calm _____ and uncomplicated, *Here, will this fix it?*

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

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

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| _____ 1. refuses to take Conrad back. | A. Coach Salan |
| _____ 2. takes her children to Oklahoma. | B. Mr. Knight |
| _____ 3. warns Cal that Conrad's grades are falling. | C. Leo |
| _____ 4. gives Conrad Dr. Berger's name and address. | D. Philip Murray |
| _____ 5. accuses Ray of chauvinism. | E. Jude |
| _____ 6. burns his groin. | F. Robbie Clay |
| _____ 7. offers Conrad extra time. | G. librarian |
| _____ 8. accepts a job application. | H. Mr. Ferrier |
| _____ 9. thinks Conrad should not be left alone. | I. Ray |
| _____ 10. is the subject of an exam question. | J. Nancy |
| _____ 11. believes Beth can't share. | K. Miss Mellon |
| _____ 12. attends to Robbie Clay's injuries. | L. Dr. Crawford |
| _____ 13. cheats at golf. | M. Howard |
| _____ 14. wants Cal to reveal the source of his problem. | N. Cherry |
| _____ 15. dates a married woman. | O. Arnold |

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the correct answer.

1. After Conrad's attempted suicide by slicing his wrist, Beth involves herself in (notation, Mediterranean décor, regrouting, English Tudor, cathedral ceilings).
2. On the surprise quiz, Conrad has no difficulty understanding the term (gemini, grosbeak, tangent, bittern, mousse), but Suzanne Mosely leaves the class in tears.
3. Although he has no extensive training in musical interpretation, Cal relaxes to "A London Symphony," by (Tía Maria, Dewar, James Taylor, Vaughan Williams, Telemann).
4. After spending thirteen years in the Evangelical Home for Orphans and Old People, 17-year-old Cal thinks of Arnold Bacon as a (mentor, guru, therapist, high achiever, soldier of fortune).
5. Beth is annoyed at Conrad's (search for identity, manipulation, depression episodes, disillusionment, patronizing).
6. During counseling sessions, Dr. Berger can offer neither Conrad or Cal a (panacea, impedimenta, tranquilizer, placebo, benediction) to cure grief and guilt.
7. The disturbing news article in Howard Butler's Sunday morning paper describes the source of the (mogul, carbon monoxide poisoning, respite, obit, ABA).
8. A photo of the (fifty, free style, breaststroke, medley relay, Orange Bowl) shows Jordan standing between Joe Lazenby and Conrad.
9. In his private thoughts, Cal chides himself for (hostility, circular thinking, low self-image, profanity, self-possession).
10. With (irrational, perfectionism, existential, stereotyped, synchronized) logic, Ray devalues life.

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Part III: Analysis (20 points)

Supply a phrase or sentence in answer to each question below.

1. What aspects of counseling are brutal?

2. How does Beth display an inability to share?

3. Why does Cal give up trying to change his wife?

4. How do friends remain true to Conrad?

5. What do bird seeds in the pocket and a twelve-foot blue spruce say about Conrad?

6. Why does the LeMans fail to delight Conrad?

7. What aspects of school hamper Conrad's recovery?

8. What does the improper behavior of Ray, Jeannine's mother, and Cal suggest about the dangers of adultery in marriage?

9. How does Beth distance herself from her family?

10. Why is the newspaper article a pivotal detail in Conrad's recovery?

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Cal needs counseling.
2. Describe the daily life that Beth chooses for her family.
3. Discuss the family's relationship before Buck's death.
4. Characterize the golf tournament in Dallas as a turning point for the Jarretts.
5. Contrast swim team meets with shopping, feeding birds, and visiting the library.

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COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Completion (20 points)

Supply a term to complete each of the following statements.

1. Conrad tries to comfort Suzanne after the _____ quiz.
2. Months after the funeral, Cal finds _____ weeping alone.
3. _____ complains that Conrad came in at 1:30 A. M.
4. After the emergency appointment, Conrad and _____ go to a cafe for breakfast.
5. _____ feels strong and able when he comforts Jeannine.
6. _____ is embarrassed that Conrad heard Stillman call him a flake.
7. The Jarrett brothers were on opposite sides of the _____.
8. Conrad considers _____ his friend and invites him to visit.
9. _____ refuses to consider counseling.
10. _____ and Audrey overhear the fight.
11. Losing _____'s friendship is Cal's first clue that Beth is not capable of love.
12. Beth believes that _____ is thin because she has a bad marriage.
13. The letter from Beth convince Conrad that _____ has kept his family together and keeps them apart.
14. At the early morning session, Conrad wants Dr. Berger to help him let go of _____ and to understand the reason for death.
15. Conrad and _____ wrote dirty words on the rec room wall.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false. Rewrite false statements to make them true.

- _____ 1. Audrey is unable to speak with Beth about Conrad's problems

- _____ 2. Cal hates Chicago and would rather live somewhere else.

- _____ 3. Jordan's death was an accident.

- _____ 4. Conrad blames himself for his brother's drowning.

- _____ 5. Dr. Berger agrees to an emergency session.

- _____ 6. Cal believes that a psychiatrist can help him.

- _____ 7. Jeannine tries to get Conrad to stop being so intense.

- _____ 8. Joe thinks that being with Conrad is too painful.

- _____ 9. Conrad walks the streets when he should be singing in the choir.

- _____ 10. Howard tries to hide the Sunday newspaper article from Conrad.

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Part III: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Finish each statement below by stating a reason:

1. Conrad feels overburdened because

2. Beth enjoys tennis tournaments because

3. Conrad studies at the library because

4. Jeannine is a worthy date for Conrad because

5. Karen is unable to relieve Conrad of tension because

6. Dr. Berger forces Conrad to tell the truth because

7. Ray is a poor example of husband and father because

8. Coach Salan fails Conrad because

9. Music soothes Conrad because

10. Conrad survives his parents' separation because

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explaining the meaning of "ordinary" in the title.
2. Discuss the importance of forgiveness to Conrad.
3. Describe the value of trust to Conrad's relationship with Dr. Berger.
4. Propose other ways of helping the Jarretts recover from Buck's death.
5. Account for the new friends who alter Conrad's life.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. anxiety | 10. appraisingly | 18. alienation |
| 2. a cappella | 11. furtive | 19. Valium |
| 3. placebos | 12. sluice | 20. quick |
| 4. mentor | 13. inundated | 21. temperament |
| 5. spastic | 14. tendrils | 22. justice |
| 6. manipulated | 15. benefactors | 23. surpassed |
| 7. panacea | 16. patronizing | 24. affliction |
| 8. impedimenta | 17. perspective | 25. serene |
| 9. lecherously | | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

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

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. regrouting | 6. panacea |
| 2. tangent | 7. carbon monoxide poisoning |
| 3. Vaughan Williams | 8. medley relay |
| 4. mentor | 9. circular thinking |
| 5. manipulation | 10. existential |

Part III: Analysis (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Completion (30 points)

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. trig | 6. Joe Lazenby | 11. Arnold Bacon |
| 2. Beth | 7. sailboat hull | 12. Nancy Hanley |
| 3. Ellen | 8. Dr. Berger | 13. love |
| 4. Dr. Berger | 9. Beth | 14. guilt |
| 5. Conrad | 10. Ward | 15. Jordan |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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