



# Ruby Holler

Sharon Creech

Teacher's Guide

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The Strongest Books You Can Buy

CLASSROOM FAVORITES

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## Synopsis

### Chapter 1

Dallas, age 13, sees a beautiful silver bird and wonders where it is going. He is jerked back to reality when Mr. Trepid, his foster father, yells at him. Dallas' twin Florida throws a clod of dirt at Mr. Trepid's back.

### Chapter 2

Twins Dallas and Florida live at the ramshackle Boxton Creek Home for Children, run by Mr. and Mrs. Trepid, cranky, middle-aged, and rigid. The Trepids pride themselves on being rule enforcers, but their rules are arbitrary and cruel. The Trepids target the brother and sister at every opportunity. Although the twins are often taken by prospective adoptive parents, they have always been quickly returned to the orphanage.

### Chapter 3

Tiller and Sairy Morey, age 60, live in idyllic Ruby Holler.

### Chapter 4

When they were five years old, the twins were sent to their first potential adoptive family, the Hoppers. Unfairly accused of theft, they are quickly bundled back to the Trepids.

### Chapter 5

The kids are punished by being thrown into the dank basement.

### Chapter 6

Tiller and Sairy invite the twins to stay with them in nearby Ruby Holler and travel with them beyond it. The twins are wary because previous foster placements have been disasters. The Trepids are thrilled to be rid of the "Trouble Twins."

### Chapter 7

The kids feel that the only reason they have survived so long in the juvenile foster system is that they stick together.

### Chapter 8

The twins are amazed that the Moreys have a lovely loft room set up for them. They are even more astonished by the ample food they are served.

### Chapter 9

Tiller wants to sail down the river to Rutabago, while Sairy wants to search for a special bird in Kangadon.

### Chapter 10

Florida finds a bird egg, which enchants her, but a memory of being abused disturbs her and she flings the egg to the wall.

### Chapter 11

Tiller is grouchy about having the kids around but decides that maybe Dallas could help him fix his boat for the journey.

### Chapter 12

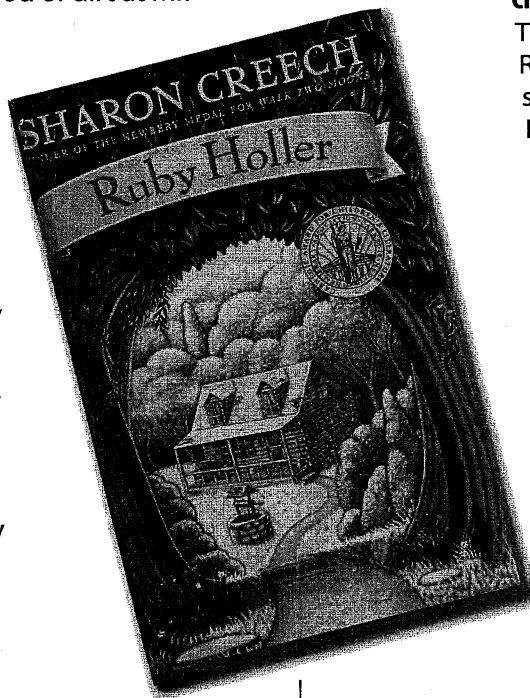
Tiller pays Florida lavishly -- \$5 a hour--for helping him fix the boat. The pay both astonishes and thrills the child.

### Chapter 13

Tiller shares memories of his childhood with Florida. He and Sairy have four kids, grown and moved away. Both Tiller and Sairy miss their children, but until now, they had not shared these feelings with each other, despite the fact that they have a close and loving marriage. The elderly couple finds the "Trouble Twins" are well worth the small amount of trouble they cause for the joy they bring.

### Chapter 14

The kids are horrified when they break some carvings, but Sairy is gentle and accepting. She teaches the kids to whittle.



## Chapter 15

Sairy wants the kids' birth certificates so they can come on the wild journey. In an alley, one man passes money to another man.

## Chapter 16

The kids try to help Sairy and Tiller by chopping down a tree and making a hole in the barn. The "help" is a disaster but the Moreys make the kids feel good about trying to help.

## Chapter 17

Tiller is dumbfounded that Florida has never seen a rocking chair, because it means that she has never been held and rocked.

## Chapter 18

Mr. Trepid remembers when one of the foster children, Joey, was ill with fever. Panicked, Trepid had begged Dallas to do something. Dallas had tenderly ministered to the child, who died nonetheless.

## Chapter 19

Sairy and Tiller reveal to the children that they keep their money in metal boxes buried on the land. Florida and Dallas follow the elderly couple as they take money from the boxes.

## Chapter 20

As they track Tiller and Sairy, Florida and Dallas get lost in the woods.

## Chapter 21

Tiller remembers when their son Buddy decided that he was an orphan. The kids bury their money as Tiller and Sairy did.

## Chapter 22

The kids inadvertently tell Mr. Trepid that the Moreys bury their money in the woods. Sairy gets Dallas' passport from Mrs. Trepid.

## Chapter 23

As the day of the exciting journeys approaches, Dallas and Florida plan to run away instead. Florida is convinced that the Moreys will be happy to be rid of them, all evidence to the contrary.

## Chapter 24

Tiller remembers when their daughter Lucy was ill. The story of her illness proves the efficacy of common sense, love, and involvement with your children.

## Chapter 25

The kids run away. They recall living with the Dreeps, who forced the kids to do hard labor and locked them in a cellar. The kids also recall the Burgertons, whose children mistreated them.

## Chapter 26

Mr. Trepid gives a mysterious man named Z some money to find out when the Moreys are leaving town and to survey the Moreys' land.

## Chapter 27

The kids wake up in the woods, ravenously hungry. They smell bacon and discover that Sairy and Tiller have come after them and are cooking them breakfast. The Moreys spare the kids' feelings by claiming the kids were only taking the camping equipment on a trial run.

## Chapter 28

Mrs. Trepid recalls the twins were left at the Home in a box.

## Chapter 29

Florida and Dallas decide to go on the trip with Sairy and Tiller and run away after they return to Ruby Holler.

## Chapter 30

Tiller and Florida have the same nightmare of drowning on a sinking boat.

## Chapter 31

They all decide to take a brief trip to rehearse the long trip.

## Chapter 32

Tiller and Florida set off on the boat. Dallas and Sairy set off on their hike. Everyone has misgivings about being separated.

## Chapter 33

When Z reports to Trepid that the Moreys have gone, Trepid pays Z to begin searching for their hidden money.

## Chapter 34

Dallas tells Sairy how he and Florida escaped from the Dreeps, the foster family that locked them in the cellar.

## Chapter 35

Florida tells Tiller about the Hoppers, the foster family that said the kids were thieves.

**Chapter 36**

Sairy tells Dallas about the family portraits he had noticed on the walls of the Moreys' house. Sairy suddenly misses her dead mother. Sairy and Dallas realize that they have forgotten to bring matches with them. As a result, they cannot cook their food.

**Chapter 37**

In a flashback, Dallas recalls how he had always distracted himself and Florida from their misery by weaving a tale of living with a kind family in the woods. We realize that his story has come true with Tiller and Sairy.

**Chapter 38**

At the Moreys', Z makes piles of stones to distract Mr. Trepid.

**Chapter 39**

Sairy slips and says "If we go to Kangadoon" rather than "When we go to Kangadoon," revealing her growing understanding that she does not want to leave Tiller and the idyllic existence they have created in Ruby Holler. Dallas recalls how Florida rarely cried, despite the severity of the abuse they suffered. Dallas had cried when Joey died. Sairy tells Dallas how she and Tiller had both coveted a piece of driftwood to whittle. They passed the wood back and forth but neither would take it from the other, so it stays on their dresser as a symbol of their love, sacrifice, and unselfishness.

**Chapter 40**

Florida tells Tiller how she and Dallas got their names. They had been left on the doorstep of the Boxton Home in a box crammed with paper and travel brochures. One brochure said "Fly to Florida!" and the other said "Destination: Dallas." From these, the Trepids took the twins' names. We also see that the twins' mother left her children to satisfy her yearning to travel and wander. This is in sharp contrast to Sairy, who realizes that for her, there's no place like home.

**Chapter 41**

Anticipating the treasure, Mrs. Trepid shops for a beautiful and costly dress at Burley's Department Store. Although she falls victim to the clerk's shameless flattery, she leaves without buying the dress. Meanwhile, Mr. Trepid shops for a Cadillac. He lies to the salesman and says that his current automobile is a Porsche. There is something poignant in their yearning for pretty things, despite their inherent greed and cruelty.

**Chapter 42**

Sairy reveals that she had gotten Dallas' birth certificate, but the birthdate listed does not match the birthdate that the Trepids had given him. Dallas wonders when his birthday really is.

**Chapter 43**

Tiller and Florida discover that they are lost on the river.

**Chapter 44**

Z has found two possible spots where the money is hidden. He reports to Trepid but deliberately misleads Trepid while taking his money for the investigation.

**Chapter 45**

The boat hits a rock, tips over, and Florida and Tiller are thrown overboard. Florida calls for Dallas to help her.

**Chapter 46**

Z finds Sairy's buried money and continues the search for Tiller's.

**Chapter 47**

Dallas senses that Florida is in peril.

**Chapter 48**

Mrs. Trepid continues her window shopping expedition. Now she shops for costly jewelry and is astonished when a simple necklace that she covets costs \$18,000. Mr. Trepid shops for an expensive watch. Both are flattered by the salespeople but leave without the baubles, which they cannot afford.

**Chapter 49**

Fighting for his life, Tiller can think only of Florida's safety. He realizes that Florida cannot swim.

**Chapter 50**

Lost in the woods, Sairy and Dallas try to find their way to a telephone. They meet two young men in the woods and trust them to watch their backpacks.

**Chapter 51**

Z realizes that the twins are his children, born after his wife had deserted him. Z is a friend of Tiller and Sairy, since his cabin is on the far side of the holler.

**Chapter 52**

Florida reaches safety but is frantic to find Tiller. She clings to a log as she tries to figure out what to do.

## Chapter 53

Dallas and Sairy finally reach civilization and a phone.

## Chapter 54

Tiller thinks of Florida and his daughter Rose as he passes out. The two girls blur together in his mind and we realize that Florida has become like a daughter to him.

## Chapter 55

Z picks up Dallas and Sairy and confesses that he took their money for safekeeping.

## Chapter 56

Florida saves Tiller. He says that his heart feels "soggy," sign of a heart attack. Dallas, Sairy, and Z hear Florida's screams.

## Chapter 57

Tiller is in the hospital, recovering from his near-drowning and the heart attack he suffered. Sairy reassures the children that he will be all right.

## Chapter 58

Sairy, the twins, and Z make brownies, which they bury along with fake gems, insects, and other objects under the rock piles to mislead and trick Mr. Trepid as he searches for their money.

## Chapter 59

Mr. Trepid goes to dig up the treasure at the Moreys'. Mrs. Trepid is furious that he is leaving her alone all day with the kids.

## Chapter 60

In the hospital, Tiller and Sairy affirm their love for each other and the twins.

## Chapter 61

Mr. Trepid digs up the Moreys' yard, finding what they have hidden. He believes the fake gems are real.

## Chapter 62

Back home, he shows the paste gems to his wife. They are ecstatic over their great treasure.

## Chapter 63

Sairy and Tiller tell the kids that the long trips are canceled. Together, the family makes one of their odd creations, "mission-accomplished" cake. Everyone dumps in whatever treats they want.

## Chapter 64

Mr. Trepid brings his "gems" in for appraisal. The jeweler instantly recognizes they are very cheap imitations—the entire pile cost less than \$2—but treats Trepid with respect nonetheless.

## Chapter 65

The Moreys' kids Buddy and Lucy arrive and don't want Florida and Dallas to stay. Overhearing the conversation, Dallas and Florida run away again.

## Chapter 66

Sairy and Tiller go after the kids. Sairy cooks bacon to welcome them home, this time for good.

## Timeline

1945	Sharon Creech born World War II ends
1948	State of Israel founded
1950	First modern credit card introduced
1952	Car seat belts introduced; polio vaccine invented
1955	Disneyland opens; McDonald's corporation founded
1957	Dr. Seuss publishes <i>The Cat in the Hat</i>
1961	Peace Corps founded Berlin Wall built
1963	President Kennedy assassinated
1967	First Super Bowl; first heart transplant Six Day War in Middle East
1974	President Nixon resigns
1979	Sharon Creech moves to England Sony introduces the Walkman
1981	First woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court Pac-man video game is very popular
1983	Sally Ride becomes first woman in space
1986	Sharon Creech writes her first book
1989	Berlin Wall taken down
1990	Nelson Mandela is freed in South Africa
1991	Collapse of Soviet Union
1994	Sharon Creech returns to America
1995	Sharon Creech wins the Newbery Medal
1997	Scientists clone sheep

## Other Books By Sharon Creech

*Absolutely Normal Chaos* (1995)  
*A Baby in a Basket: New-Baby Songs* (2004)  
*Bloomability* (1998)  
*Chasing Redbird* (1997)  
*A Fine, Fine School* (2001)  
*Fishing in the Air* (2000)  
*Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* (2003)  
*Heartbeat* (2004)  
*Love That Dog* (2001)  
*Pleasing the Ghost* (1996)  
*Ruby Holler* (2002)  
*Walk Two Moons* (1994)  
*The Wanderer* (2000)

### Author Sketch

Sharon Creech was born in 1945, in Cleveland, Ohio. After completing her BA degree at Hiram College, she earned an MA at George Mason University. Her first marriage ended in divorce but produced two children: Rob and Karin. Creech's life took an unexpected turn when she decided to teach English at the TASIS England American School in Surrey, England. She lived in England from 1979 to 1994, briefly teaching in Switzerland.



Creech was an enthusiastic writer throughout grade school and high school and an equally avid reader but did not consider a career as a writer. As an English teacher, Creech was able to share her love both of literature and of writing. She did not begin writing until her father died of a stroke in 1986. Her father's inability to express himself opened her own floodgates of creativity. *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, Creech's first book for young readers, was published in England in 1990 but did not find a publisher in America. Five years later, *Walk Two Moons* catapulted Sharon Creech to fame in America when it won the Newbery Medal.

Currently, Creech lives with her husband Lyle in New Jersey, where he is the headmaster of a private school and she continues to write. Creech is an often-invited guest at national and regional conferences and literature festivals where she continues to whet the appetites of current and future readers.



### Critics Corner

*Ruby Holler* earned overall good reviews, with only minor criticism. For example, Emilie Coulter, reviewing the novel for amazon.com, said, "The perfectly happy ending is somewhat predictable, but readers who have fallen in love with each quirky character won't mind a bit." *Publishers Weekly* noted that "This poignant story evokes a feeling as welcoming as fresh-baked bread.... The novel celebrates the healing effects of love and compassion. Although conflicts emerge, readers will have little doubt that all will end well for the children and the grandparently Moreys."

*Booklist* was equally positive: "In an unusual approach for a children's book, Tiller and Sairy's points of view are at least as important as those of Dallas and Florida; and how the foursome play off one another is one of the key points of the narrative. There's a larger-than-life feel to this novel that makes the minor characters and subplots feel a bit out of scale--or out of sync--but the main story rests squarely on the four well-drawn characters."

Reviewing the novel for *School Library Journal*, critic Robyn Ryan Vandebroek wrote: "While the plot is predictable, the story weaves in an interesting mix of mystery, adventure, and humor, along with age-old and modern problems. Creech does a fine job of developing the unique personalities and the sibling relationship, and the children's defense mechanisms (Dallas's dreamy escapism and Florida's aggression) figure prominently in the interplay among the characters. The text is lively and descriptive with an authentic, if somewhat mystical, rural ambiance. This entertaining read from a first-rate author will not disappoint Creech's many fans."

## Bibliography

- Authors And Artists For Young Adults, Volume 21*, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1997.
- Beacham's Guide To Literature For Young Adults, Volumes 9, 11, 12*, Gale (Detroit, MI), 2001.
- Booklist*, August, 2001, Hazel Rochman, review of *Ruby Holler*, p. 2118.
- Children's Literature Review, Volume 42*, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1997.
- Horn Book*, 605; November/December, 2001, Betty Carter, review of *Ruby Holler*, p. 743.
- New York Times Book Review*, May 21, 1995, pp. 24, 34; October 21, 2001, Meg Wolitzer, review of *Ruby Holler*, p. 30.
- St. James Guide To Young Adult Writers*, 2nd edition, St. James (Detroit, MI), 1999, pp. 195-197.
- School Library Journal*, review of *Ruby Holler*, p. 177; September, 2001, interview with Sharon Creech, p. 21.
- Time*, August 27, 2001, Andrea Sachs, "A Writer Who's Thirteen At Heart," p. F17.

## General Objectives

1. To understand a tall tale
2. To probe the novel's title
3. To analyze the symbolism of the setting
4. To recognize the novel's theme
5. To describe the novel's plot
6. To sympathize with the twins' plight
7. To find examples of compassion
8. To explore the ways that kindness can be shown
9. To relish the author's use of humor
10. To appreciate the clever plot twists

## Specific Objectives

1. To understand the magic of *Ruby Holler*
2. To understand why Sairy and Tiller adopt Florida and Dallas
3. To explore why the twins are initially wary of the Moreys and keep running away from their home
4. To analyze how the Moreys build trust in Florida and Dallas through compassion, kindness, and patience
5. To describe how Florida sheds her defense mechanisms

6. To understand why Dallas retreats into the world of imagination
7. To assess the importance of love
8. To compare and contrast the plot and characters to the conventions of traditional fairy tales
9. To decide whether or not Tiller and Sairy are eccentric
10. To understand the novel's ending

## Literary Terms And Applications

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

**conflict in literature** a struggle or fight. There are two kinds of conflict. In an external conflict, characters struggle against a force outside themselves. In an internal conflict, characters battle a force within themselves. *Ruby Holler* has both types of conflict. The twins experience a strong internal conflict as they struggle with their desire to run away from Tiller and Sairy and their desire to stay. After so many years of abuse, they have great difficulty learning to trust. The novel also has external conflicts as the kids earn the nickname the "Trouble Twins" by battling with the neglectful Trepids, cruel potential adoptive parents, and the jealous children of these adoptive parents. The adoptive parents see the children as dishonest, but readers realize they are just abused and neglected and so have built up fierce defense mechanisms.

**symbolism** an image stands for something other than what was expected. The ocean, for example, may be said to symbolize "eternity" and the phrase "river to the sea" could stand for "life flowing into afterlife." In most instances the symbol does not directly reveal what it stands for; rather, the meaning must be discovered through a close reading of the literary work and an understanding of conventional literary and cultural symbols. For example, we realize that the "stars and stripes" stands for the American flag. We know this because we are told it is so, for the flag itself in no way looks like the United States. Without cultural agreement, many of the symbols we commonly accept would be meaningless. *Ruby Holler* is heavy with symbolism. The block of driftwood in Chapter 39, for instance, comes to symbolize love and devotion. Both Sairy

and Tiller covet the wood because it would make a beautiful carving. Nonetheless, they do not want to deprive the other of the pleasure of having it. As a result, they pass it back and forth and finally it comes to rest on their dresser. Tiller says, "Sairy, I'm putting this here for a while. It'll belong to both of us. Whoever wants to get started on it can do it." Neither has touched it since.

**tall tale** a folk tale that exaggerates the main events or the characters' abilities. Tall tales came from the oral tradition, as pioneers sitting around the campfires at night tried to top each other's outrageous stories. Twain's short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is a classic American tall tale. Sharon Creech is working in the same tradition in *Ruby Holler*, as the exaggerated cruelty of the foster parents shows. Each oddly-named couple outdoes the previous one with invented meanness, such as locking the twins in the damp basement, having them dig wells, and forcing them to sleep on their backs only.

## The Importance Of Setting

The setting is a crucial element in the novel; it gives the book its title and runs through the narrative like a beautiful red thread. Ruby Holler is the idyllic, mythic meadow that is home to Tiller, Sairy, and their closest neighbor Z. Later, Florida and Dallas come to live there as well. The Holler comes to represent Eden, an unspoiled paradise.

When Sairy was a teenager, she decided to leave the Holler to attend college in New York City. She had been there two weeks when Tiller appeared at her door, imploring her to come home and marry him. Sairy slammed the door in his face. A week later, and every week thereafter, Tiller sent Sairy a post card describing the Holler as it changed with the passage of the seasons. "The maples are blazing rubies" he wrote on one card. He describes how an ice storm had left millions of diamonds dazzling on the trees.

These real jewels – the treasures of nature and love-- are juxtaposed to the fake jewels that the Trepids find hidden under the rocks on the Moreys' land. Readers come to understand that the setting is essential: it is the shelter of love, acceptance, and compassion that Tiller and Sairy have created for themselves and extend to cover Dallas and Florida as well.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Novels

Avi, *The Secret School*  
 Andrew Clemens, *The School Story*  
 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*  
 Kate Dicamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*  
 Patricia Reilly Giff, *Pictures of Hollis Wood*  
 Carl Hiaasen, *Hoot*  
 Ben Mikaleson, *Touching Spirit Bear*  
 Stephanie Tolan, *Surviving the Applewhites*  
 Jerry Spinelli, *Loser*  
 Beatriz Vida, *A Library for Juana*  
 Lawrence Yep, *When the Circus Came to Town*

### DVDs And Videos

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004)  
 Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004)  
*The Miracle Worker* (2000)

### Nonfiction

Douglas Florian, *Winter Eyes*  
 Anna Grossnickle Hines, *Pieces: A Year in Poems & Quilts*  
 Tina Schart Hyman, *A Child's Calendar*  
 Pat Mora, *Love to Mamá*

### Internet

Sharon Creech home page  
<http://www.sharoncreech.com/>  
 Meet Sharon Creech  
[http://www.Bookwire.com/bookwire/MeettheAuthor/Interview\\_Sharon\\_Creech.htm](http://www.Bookwire.com/bookwire/MeettheAuthor/Interview_Sharon_Creech.htm)

## Themes And Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Sharon Creech's *Ruby Holler* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- acceptance
- cruelty and abuse
- encouragement
- fate
- generosity
- humor
- kindness
- journeys
- love
- role-models

### Motifs

- dealing with painful feelings in a healthy way
- coping with abandonment
- being open to new experiences
- using humor to deal with pain
- experiencing kindness
- giving and receiving love
- living an authentic life
- benefiting from role-models
- helping others in need
- traveling as a means of self-expression

### Meaning Study

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

1. She felt that the only reason they'd survived this long without turning into cowardly wimps or juvenile delinquents was because they'd had each other. (Chap. 7, p. 33)  
*(Creech mixes slang and technical terms to create her unique style. Here, for instance, she uses "wimps," a slang term for weak people, as well as the technical term "juvenile delinquents" for young people who have broken the law and passed into the legal system. This passage also shows the devotion that Dallas and Florida have for each other.)*
2. We should send those kids back, he thought. Sairy should come with me down the river to the Rutabago, and then I should go with her, searching for that stupid bird in Kangadoon. (Chap. 9, p. 42)  
*(Creech invents her own words to capture rich flavor of the exotic places that Tiller and Sairy dream of visiting. Neither Rutabago nor Kangadoon is real. The former suggests a vegetable, conveying the lushness of the jungle; the latter suggests a kangaroo, suggesting the great distances Sairy will have to cover to find her mythical bird.)*
3. "Putrid egg," she said. (Chap. 10, p. 47)  
*(Florida uses the same words over and over; "putrid" is one of her favorite adjectives. Her limited vocabulary shows her inarticulate rage, her inability to reach out and express her anger*

*at the unfairness of life. Putrid means "rotten," which aptly describes the life that she and Dallas have suffered through with the Trepids.)*

4. "Hey, you're with us here now," Dallas said, "maybe you ought to make yourselves some getting-used-to-kids-again stew." (Chap. 13, p. 66)  
*(Creech plays with words in creative and imaginative ways. One of the most interesting is the way she makes up descriptive titles for the recipes the Moreys use to bring everyone together and smooth over pain.)*
5. "Tiller, you can't send them back as if they're a pair of boots that don't fit right." (Chap. 15, p. 77)  
*(The metaphor of boots runs through the novel. Sairy calls Tiller her "comfortable old boot," for instance. Here, she makes the point that having children is a life-long commitment.)*
6. "You're never too old to be rocked." (Chap. 17, p. 89)  
*(Tiller is both astonished and saddened that Florida has never been held and rocked, for this means that she has never been loved. Thus, he is using the term "rocked" to mean cuddled and comforted.)*
7. Mr. Trepid rushed to Joey and breathed into his mouth and pounded on his chest while Mrs. Trepid phoned the doctor. (Chap. 18, p. 94)  
*(Mr. Trepid is trying to perform CPR on the child, a form of first aid that should only be used by those trained to do it correctly. This incident shows the Trepids' inability to cope in an emergency as juxtaposed to Dallas' ability to think coolly and compassionately.)*
8. "But we're leaving pretty soon, aren't we?" (Chap. 21, p. 111)  
*(Because they have been so badly maltreated, the kids have learned not to trust anyone but each other. Here, they plan to run away from the Moreys, even though the Moreys treat them as they would their own children.)*



9. "It's like a whole long chain of connected people," Dallas said. (Chap. 36, p. 194)  
*(Looking at the family pictures, Dallas comments to Sairy that the family has formed a chain. He and Florida are forming that chain with Sairy and Tiller, a family they have long desired to create.)*
10. Or maybe it was because there might be times, like now, when, if you knew everything about someone else, your heart would be too full and it might overflow. (Chap. 54, p. 258)  
*(As he drifts under water, Tiller's last thoughts are of Florida, his daughter Rose, and his wife Sairy. He is filled with love for all of them, as the author conveys her message: the power of love to rebuild shattered lives.)*

### Comprehension Study

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

#### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

- How did Florida and Tiller get their unusual names?  
*(The twins were abandoned in a box lined with papers, including travel brochures. The Trepids named the kids from the travel brochures for "Fly to Florida!" and "Destination: Dallas!")*
- Who or what is Ruby Holler?  
*(It is the beautiful area in the woods where Sairy and Tiller live.)*
- How is Z similar to the Moreys? How is he different?  
*(Like the Moreys, Z lives a simple life in the woods. Unlike them, he is lazy, slovenly, and careless. He does not remember when his wife left; he cannot rouse himself enough to tell the twins that he is their father or to assume his responsibilities toward them.)*
- Who are Dallas and Florida's birth parents?  
*(Their father is the Moreys' neighbor Z; their mother is Z's wife, who deserted him before the twins were born.)*

5. Why do Tiller and Sairy want the Trouble Twins to live with them?  
*(Sairy and Tiller miss their own four children, now grown and gone. They want the joy that comes with raising children once again.)*

#### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

- What do birds in the story represent? What does Ruby Holler symbolize?  
*(The birds stand for life, especially nurturing children. Ruby Holler comes to represent Eden, an idyllic and unspoiled paradise.)*
- What parts of the book did you find humorous? In what ways?  
*(It is humorous when Sairy and Dallas discover while on the trial run of their vacation that they have forgotten to bring all the essentials: a compass, matches, and a canteen filled with water.)*
- From the experiences described in this novel, what can you infer makes someone a good parent?  
*(Possible response: A good parent is loving, kind, patient, compassionate, trusting, and generous. A good parent also has to have a sense of humor.)*

#### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

- In what way is *Ruby Holler* similar to a fairy tale?  
*(As with a fairy tale, the novel is filled with amazing coincidences, monsters in the form of the cruel foster parents, exaggerated characters, and a happy ending.)*
- Did you like the strange names and events in this book? Why or why not?  
*(Readers who enjoy fantasy are apt to find the strange names and events enchanting. Those who prefer more realistic stories might not be as enthusiastic.)*

#### Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

- Describe an imaginary place where you would like to go on vacation with Tiller or Sairy.
- Working with a small group of classmates, role-play a dialogue between Dallas and Florida, in which they discuss how they have changed since coming to live with Tiller and Sairy.

## Across The Curriculum

### Art/Music

1. Make a treasure map like the one Z makes for Mr. Trepid.
2. Carve a bird from a bar of soap, as Tiller and Sairy might.
3. Draw or paint a new cover for the novel.
4. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main events.
5. Make a scale model of Boxtton or Ruby Holler.
6. Create a travel brochure for Rutabago or Kangadoon.

### Language Arts

1. One reviewer noted that "The characters introduced here-- two abandoned children, their villainous guardians and a kindly country couple-- might have stepped out of a Dickens novel." Read a novel by Charles Dickens and compare and contrast it to *Ruby Holler*.
2. In many ways, *Ruby Holler* is a tall tale, an exaggerated story. Write a brief tall tale based on any two characters from the novel.
3. Write an escapist daydream that Dallas might have.
4. Imagine that you had written this novel. Write your own dedication and explain its meaning.
5. Florida's language teems with outrageous negativity; for example, everything is "putrid." Analyze what her language reveals about her character and her life.
6. Chapter 8 is called "*Hansel and Gretel*." In an essay, explain why.

### History/Social Studies

1. Find a place that could have been the model for Ruby Holler. Trace the similarities.
2. Find out more about the foster care system. How do children get placed into it? How are people evaluated for their suitability to be foster parents? Share your findings in a web page or pamphlet.
3. Explain how to use an on-line map program so people don't get lost, as Tiller and Sairy do.

### Speech

1. With a team of classmates, debate whether the Trepids are evil and cruel or just tired and cranky. Use information from the book to support your side of the debate.

2. In a roundtable discussion, explore the criteria for placing children in foster care.
3. Give a speech in which you argue that Z should or should not have told the children that he is their birth father.

### Science

1. Write a recipe for "beat-the-blues broccoli," "anti-cranky crumpets," "getting-used-to-kids-again stew" or any of the outrageous dishes described in the novel.
2. Write ten sensible rules that can help ensure the safety and health of young adults. Explain what each rule accomplishes.
3. Pretend that you were going on the trip with Tiller or Sairy. Make a list of everything you would have to pack. Don't forget the matches, canteen, or compass!
4. Explain to the class how to navigate with a compass. Give a demonstration.
5. Make a chart showing the different plants that cause allergic reactions, such as poison ivy, oak, and sumac.
6. Make a chart showing the symptoms of a heart attack in men and women.

### Math

1. Find out how much a new Cadillac and a new Porsche cost.
2. Tiller and Sairy keep their money buried in a tin box. Create a brochure showing how they should invest their money. Include information on stocks, bonds, and CDs, for instance.
3. Tiller pays Florida \$5 per hour for helping him. Find out what the minimum wage is in your state.

## Alternate Assessment

1. Write a character sketch for Florida or Dallas.
2. Create a *Ruby Holler* board game, based on events in the novel. Include playing pieces, a board, and cards.
3. Read another novel by Sharon Creech and compare and contrast it to *Ruby Holler*.
4. Write a summary of this book in poem form.

## Vocabulary

Match each word to its meaning. Write the letter of your choice in the space provided.

- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. bawl      | a. piece; clumsy person |
| _____ 2. conniving | b. very wet             |
| _____ 3. roam      | c. move restlessly      |
| _____ 4. rowdy     | d. cry noisily          |
| _____ 5. forlorn   | e. crooked              |
| _____ 6. misfit    | f. walk around          |
| _____ 7. clod      | g. weak                 |
| _____ 8. chaos     | h. sneaky               |
| _____ 9. frail     | i. loner                |
| _____ 10. demented | j. tattered             |
| _____ 11. fidget   | k. wild, rambunctious   |
| _____ 12. summit   | l. disorder, confusion  |
| _____ 13. lopsided | m. mad                  |
| _____ 14. scruffy  | n. peak                 |
| _____ 15. drenched | o. lonely               |

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| A. Z           | F. Morgan             |
| B. Dallas      | G. Sharon Creech      |
| C. Mrs. Trepid | H. Buddy              |
| D. Florida     | I. Lucy               |
| E. Sairy       | J. Mr. and Mrs. Dreep |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The woman who runs the Boxton Creek Home for Children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Sairy and Tiller's son
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. An early foster family that rejected Florida and Dallas
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The Trepids' elderly assistant
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The female half of the "Trouble Twins"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Dallas and Florida's birth father
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Sairy and Tiller's daughter
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. A 60-year-old woman who is famed as a woodcarver
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The author
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Florida's twin brother

### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Circle the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. When the novel opens, Dallas sees a beautiful (**silver bird, silver snake**) and wonders where it is going.
2. The Trepids pride themselves on being (**good cooks, rule enforcers**).
3. When they were (**fifteen, five**) years old, the twins were sent to their first potential adoptive family, the Hoppers.
4. The twins are amazed that the Moreys have a lovely room set up for them. They are even more astonished by the ample (**clothing, food**) they are given.
5. Tiller wants to sail down the river to the (**Rutabago, Rome**).
6. Sairy wants to search for a special bird in (**the Caribbean, Kangadoon**).
7. Tiller is grouchy about having the kids around but decides that maybe Florida could help him fix his (**bike, boat**) for the journey.
8. The kids are horrified when they break some carvings, but Sairy is gentle and accepting. She teaches the kids to (**whittle, whistle**).
9. Sairy wants the kids' (**bank accounts, birth certificates**) so they can come on the wild journey.
10. At the Moreys', Z makes piles of (**brownies, stones**) to distract Mr. Trepid.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When the novel opens, Dallas and Florida are living with Mrs. and Mrs. Trepid.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The kids feel that the only reason they have survived so long in the juvenile foster system is that they stick together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Florida finds a bird egg, which enchants her, so she tenderly places the egg in a box and hatches it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Tiller and Sairy had a child, but he died early. They never recovered from their grief.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Sairy tells Dallas how she and Tiller had both wanted a piece of driftwood to whittle. They passed it back and forth but neither would take it from the other, so it stays on their dresser as a symbol of their love, sacrifice, and unselfishness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The twins' father deserted the family to satisfy his yearning to travel and wander.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Anticipating great treasure, Mrs. Trepid shops for a beautiful and costly dress at Burley's Department Store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Mr. Trepid shops for a Cadillac.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Sairy suffers a heart attack over worry for Tiller's safety.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. At the end of the novel, Tiller and Sairy give Z a lot of money for helping them so much.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Which parts of *Ruby Holler* do you like the most? Why?
- 2. Summarize the plot (story line) of *Ruby Holler*.
- 3. Describe what you learned about parenting from this novel.
- 4. Compare and contrast this book to other books that you have read. How is it the same and different?

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Write the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. When Lucy was ill, she wanted to eat only \_\_\_\_\_.
2. When the kids wake up in the woods and smell \_\_\_\_\_, they discover that Sairy and Tiller have come to take them home.
3. Sairy tells Dallas how she and Tiller had both wanted the same piece of \_\_\_\_\_. They passed it back and forth but neither would take it from the other, so it stays on their dresser.
4. Anticipating the treasure, Mrs. Trepid shops for a beautiful and costly necklace and a new \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Tiller is dumbfounded that Florida has never seen a(n) \_\_\_\_\_, because it means that she has never been held and rocked.
6. Mr. Trepid wants a car and an expensive \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Sairy, the twins, and Z make \_\_\_\_\_, which they bury along with insects, and other objects under the rock piles to mislead and trick Mr. Trepid as he searches for their money.
8. Mr. Trepid is thrilled when he finds \_\_\_\_\_ in a hole on the Moreys' property. He assumes these are real and very valuable.
9. Sairy always called Tiller her "handsome old \_\_\_\_\_."
10. Sairy and Tiller reveal to the children that they keep their money in \_\_\_\_\_, buried in the land.

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. birds
2. the tree that the kids chop down
3. Rutabago and Kangadon
4. a Cadillac
5. Joey

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Matching (20 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. Use each name only once.

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| _____ 1. Dallas' twin sister                              | A. Z             |
| _____ 2. The Trepids' fragile assistant                   | B. Dallas        |
| _____ 3. The Moreys' adult son                            | C. Mrs. Trepid   |
| _____ 4. The young man who hikes with Sairy               | D. Florida       |
| _____ 5. The Moreys' adult daughter                       | E. Sairy         |
| _____ 6. One of the monstrous potential adoptive families | F. Morgan        |
| _____ 7. The author                                       | G. Sharon Creech |
| _____ 8. The twins' birth father                          | H. Buddy         |
| _____ 9. Tiller's wife                                    | I. Lucy          |
| _____ 10. The woman who runs the Boxtton Home             | J. The Dreeps    |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe the novel's main conflict.
2. Explain how Dallas and Florida change over the course of the novel.
3. Analyze how the story would be different if told from a different point of view.
4. Explain what function Tiller and Sairy fulfill in the novel.

## Answer Key

### Vocabulary Test

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

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

#### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. silver bird    | 6. Kangadon           |
| 2. rule enforcers | 7. boat               |
| 3. five           | 8. whittle            |
| 4. food           | 9. birth certificates |
| 5. Rutabago       | 10. stones            |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Popsicles         | 6. watch        |
| 2. bacon             | 7. brownies     |
| 3. driftwood or wood | 8. fake gems    |
| 4. dress             | 9. boot         |
| 5. rocking chair     | 10. metal boxes |

#### Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. Birds symbolize different things in the novel. On one level, they are the foster children who need to be nurtured like all fragile creatures until they are mature enough to live on their own. The birds also symbolize happiness and escape.
2. The kids chop down the tree that Tiller had planted when his own four children grew up and left the house. The tree stands for the past, and chopping it down stands for a new beginning. Dallas and Florida have replaced the Moreys' children in the sense that the Moreys get an opportunity to relive the happiness of their youth raising children.
3. Rutabago and Kangadon are the mythical places that the Moreys want to visit. They symbolize the exotic dreams we have.
4. To Mr. Trepid, a Cadillac symbolizes wealth, ease, and status—all that he had been lacking his entire life.
5. Joey, the child who died under the Trepids' care, symbolizes what can happen to neglected children. It is a sad story, one that could all-too-easily have been Florida's and Dallas'.

#### Part III: Matching (20 points)

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

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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