

Socks

by Beverly Cleary

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Lori Lindemann

A Perma-Bound Production

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SYNOPSIS

This heartwarming story of changes within a family brought about by the birth of a baby is told from a cat's point of view. It's a story of resistance to change, anger and jealousy, and, finally, acceptance and fondness of a new family member.

Chap. 1 The story opens with two siblings, Debbie and George, standing between the mailbox and the newspaper rack near the door of a supermarket. The children are trying to sell 7-week-old kittens, and neither is happy about it. One kitten keeps trying to crawl out of the box and escape from his wiggling, crawling, mewling littermates. The white pawed kitten continues to work on his escape, and Debbie keeps sticking him back in the bottom of the box, trying to hide him. Debbie wants to keep Socks because he is her favorite. After a while, the children mark down the price of the kittens from 25 cents to 20 cents.

Debbie is cradling Socks in her arms when a woman in a muumuu dress and with her hair on rollers herds her three quarrelling children across the street. The children want a kitten, and they want Socks. Debbie hides him behind her back, but they insist it is Socks that they want. George takes Socks from her hands and sticks him in the mailbox so they will not have to sell him to the woman and her brood. The woman quickly offers to buy Popsicles for her children, relieved to have an excuse for not buying a kitten. Debbie and George are then left to worry about getting Socks out of the mailbox before he roasts in there. The mailman opens the box eight minutes later, releasing Socks from his sweltering prison. All this commotion attracts several shoppers, including a young couple, Marilyn and Bill Bricker, whom Debbie convinces to buy Socks. The Brickers pay George 50 cents and take Socks home with them.

Chap. 2 The Brickers live in a shabby house with a weedy lawn. They make a bed for Socks from a carton and an old sweat shirt and put it in the laundry room beside his dish, but they do not object when he sleeps on the couch. They feed him canned and dry cat foods and buy raw meat for him. They play with him and tend to his every need. Socks loves attention. Mrs. Bricker's typewriter is his rival for her attention, and Socks does not like rivals. He is the center of the household, and he is content. Then Mrs. Bricker's lap begins to shrink. One day she says, "Bill! It's time to go," and they leave without any attention to Socks. The next few days Mr. Bricker dumps food into Socks's dish early in the morning and again at night, but other than that Socks is left alone with no attention. Late one morning, Socks hears their sta-

tion-wagon door slam. He is elated to see both of his owners and runs to greet them. Mrs. Bricker stops to rub his head and talk to him. Then Socks notices the bundle in Mr. Bricker's arms. When he looks in the bundle he sees a creature with a small, wrinkled, furless face. His eyes grow large, his hair stands on end, and he backs away. He does not trust it! From that point on his life is very different. Mr. and Mrs. Bricker attend to the new "pet's" every need while Socks is ignored. Eventually Socks understands that the new pet is a small person. Socks tries everything possible to regain the attention of the new parents, but the new baby, Charles William, is now the center of the household. The only consolation is that Mr. Bricker feeds the left-over baby formula to Socks.

Chap. 3 Life is very, very different. Meals are not served on time, laps are occupied, lights and the washer and dryer are turned on at all hours, and there is lots of company. Socks' one comfort is the left-over baby formula. One Sunday Charles William's Uncle Walter, Aunt Cassie, and cousin Mike come to visit. Charles William is very afraid of Uncle Walter and cries every time he looks at the man. Finally, Aunt Cassie decides it is Uncle Walter's bald head that is frightening the baby. Mike makes noises like the threatening wailing of another cat and the short, quick pants of a dog that frighten Socks. The family brings Charles William a brown corduroy bear with which Socks wants to play.

Aunt Cassie comments that Socks has gotten too fat and that is not healthy. She tells Mrs. Bricker that their dog is on a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet and is much healthier. That's when Mrs. Bricker decides that both she and Socks are going to lose weight. Mr. Bricker starts the program that night at supper time. Socks gets half the amount of meat he usually got, and the left-over baby formula is poured down the drain. Socks steals a wiener off the counter, and Mr. Bricker chases him with a broom. Socks decides his owners do not care enough about him to feed him properly and that he will have to live by his wits.

Chap. 4 As Charles William grows he is given more solid food and fewer bottles. Socks is never given all he wants to eat, and the Brickers insist that he exercise. He is hungry all the time. He starts going to the neighbors' houses begging for something to eat. The little girl next door tries to give him Hawaiian punch and leftover chocolate pudding. When he returns home the Brickers are getting ready to go out for the evening. The babysitter is Mrs. Risley from the Sitter's Service Agency, and she calls Socks "Skeezix." When the Brickers leave, Mrs. Risley puts a piece of Scotch tape on Charles William's foot which fascinates

him for an extended period of time. Mrs. Risley then devotes her entire attention to Socks, brushing him, rubbing him, and sharing her food with him. That night Socks goes to sleep in Mrs. Risley's perfect lap; she strokes his fur until he falls into the first deep, perfect sleep he has had since Charles William came home from the hospital. Mrs. Risley loves him more than she loves his rival.

Chap. 5 Mrs. Bricker does a thorough cleaning of the house in preparation for a visit from Mr. Bricker's mother. Mr. Bricker's mother, Nana, makes a big fuss over Charles William, but she is upset that the Brickers have a cat in their house. She thinks that the baby may be allergic to cats or that Socks might scratch him. She is convinced that Socks should not remain a part of the family. Everything Socks does seems to upset her; he snags her dress, tears up her nylon stockings, and pounces on her knitting needles. Each day she grows more critical, and the Brickers finally lock Socks in the laundry room to sleep.

One night he escapes from the laundry room. Nana is sleeping in the living room on the couch. Socks gets into her luggage, then he notices her wig which is sitting on a faceless white head. He pats it with his paw and knocks it onto the floor where he tussles and scuffles and wrestles with it. Afterward, he sleeps in Nana's suitcase. The next morning is very hectic. Mrs. Bricker forgot to set the alarm. Everyone is rushing around—Mr. Bricker needs to leave for his class, Mrs. Bricker is trying to get the baby's food ready and apologize to Nana for what Socks has done to her wig—and Socks is ignored. So he nips Mrs. Bricker on the ankle causing her to bleed. He is promptly and roughly put outside with no kind words and no breakfast. Mr. Bricker said, "Beat it, you cat, we can't have a cat that bites in *this* house."

Chap. 6 Socks becomes an outside cat. His water bowl and food dish are moved to the back steps and his bed to the garage. The garage window is left open so he can come and go. He spends lots of time watching the activities in the house, and Mrs. Bricker says to Charles William, "See the kitty?" Socks is afraid of the garbage men and the milk man and the old black tomcat who lives across the back fence, Old Taylor. Socks allows Old Taylor to claim the fence, but one morning he finds Old Taylor eating out of his dish. That he will not tolerate. The two cats growl, hiss, and eventually fight. Old Taylor gets the better of Socks, and Socks is happy when he can escape from the snarling, biting mass of muddy black fur. He tries to jump through the window into the garage, but the mud caked in his fur weighs him down. He tries to lick his bleeding forepaw, but he gets a mouthful of mud. Finally he crawls to his own back door and cries a pitiful meow for help. Mrs. Bricker opens the door and brings him inside. The Brickers give their undivided attention to cleaning and pampering Socks. When Charles William cries, Mrs. Bricker says, "Socks needs us. You'll have to wait." Then she asks if Socks can live in the house with them again. Charles William stares at Socks and calls him Ticky. The parents are elated—the baby had spoken his first word. Mrs. Bricker said, "Kit-tee," and Charles William said, "Ticky." Socks falls asleep in a load of clean diapers on top of the dryer. He is happy; Mrs. Bricker and the baby are talking about him.

Chap. 7 Charles William has grown during the time Socks has been an outside cat. He is not content to play in his playpen. He clings to the bars and howls to be out. When he is out he is into everything. He pulls magazines off the coffee table, scatters Socks' dry food all over the floor, tries to chew on the lamp cord,

tries to eat the things he finds on the floor, and makes a lot of noise yelling. Most of all he crawls after Socks. Socks learns to put up with the baby and escape from him when necessary. One afternoon Charles William throws his baby bottle out of the crib, and the milk spills everywhere. This causes Socks to go investigate.

Then Charles William rocks in his crib until it slides across the floor to the door, pushes the door shut, and rocks some more until the crib is blocking the door. Charles William finds a crack in his crib bumper and starts pulling out tufts of cotton. Socks leaps and pounces and races after the falling tufts, sliding through the spilled milk. Charles William laughs and pulls out more cotton. Mrs. Bricker tries to get in, but the crib bars the door.

When Mrs. Bricker gets to the window, she sees the baby throw his bear out of the crib and Socks pounce on it. Charles William pulls wallpaper off the wall and discovers how to work the light switch. He laughs until he has the hiccoughs. Charles William and Socks play until they are both very tired. Then the baby goes to sleep. Socks jumps into the crib and lays with his back pressed against Charles William's back. He is completely at peace. Mrs. Bricker finally gets into the room, with the help of a ladder. She looks at Socks lying so close to the baby, and he looks back at her. After a while, she picks up Brown Bear and puts him in the crib, reaches over and strokes Sock's fur, giving him permission to stay with Charles William. Socks closes his eyes and goes to sleep.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Beverly Cleary was born in McMinnville, Oregon, and lived on a farm in Yamhill, until she was old enough to start school. Yamhill was so small it did not have a library, so her mother arranged for the State Library to send books to Yamhill and acted as the librarian in an upstairs room of a bank. It was there Mrs. Cleary learned to love books. The family then moved to Portland, where she attended grammar school, and Mrs. Cleary was placed in a low reading circle, an experience that allows her to identify and sympathize with struggling readers. By the third grade she had mastered her reading difficulties and spent most of her time reading books or traveling to and from the public library. Her school librarian suggested that she should write stories for children when she grew up. This appealed to her; she decided she would write funny stories about her neighborhood and the sort of children she knew.

She graduated from junior college in Ontario, California, and the University of California at Berkeley. Then she entered the School of Librarianship at the University of Washington, Seattle, where she specialized in library work with children. She worked in Yakima, Washington, as a Children's Librarian until she married Clarence Cleary and moved to California.

Mrs. Cleary's books have earned many prestigious awards. In 1984 *Dear Mr. Henshaw* was awarded the John Newbery Medal for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. Two of her books, *Ramona and Her Father* (1978) and *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* (1982), were named Newbery Honor Books. She has received the American Library Association's Laura Ingalls Wilder Award (1975), the Catholic Library Association's Regina Medal (1980), and the University of Southern Mississippi's Silver Medallion (1982). All were presented to recognize her lasting contribution to children's literature. Mrs. Cleary's books have also been awarded more than 35

statewide awards based on the direct votes of her readers. In 1984, Mrs. Cleary was the United States author nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, a prestigious international award. Her books appear in fourteen languages in over twenty countries.

Mr. and Mrs. Cleary are the parents of twins, Marianne and Malcolm, who are now grown. Her hobbies are travel and needlework.

CRITIC'S CORNER

In 1973, Beverly Cleary added yet another title to her extensive list of children's books, *Socks*. *Children's Book Review Service* said, "This wonderful author has once again turned out a warm story about an animal that every child will long to have....The story is told by Socks and has some humorous touching moments that will be enjoyable to anyone who reads it...[The] story is clearly Cleary and great!"

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books said, "[Socks is] a new-baby story told from the cat's viewpoint although not told by the cat....When Socks does finally reclaim his position as a member of the inner circle, he becomes adjusted to the baby in a hilarious true-to-life episode that achieves the Ultimate Goal, a new friend who always wants to play and snuggle. Not being child-centered, this may have a smaller audience than early Cleary books, but it is written with the same easy grace, the same felicitious humor and sharply observant eye."

School Library Journal reported, "[Socks] is funny, easy to read, and a situation easy for independent readers to correlate to their own reactions.... [In] the deftest way possible, the author deals with everything the second, third, and fourth grade singleton is likely to encounter with a new baby around the house....Try to get this one past the recognized indifference of middle childhood to cats; the beast is an adult fancy, the book is good fun for children."

Though most critics have long praised Beverly Cleary's books for their humor, some have complained that they are too old-fashioned and that they don't deal with the problems facing today's young readers. *Publishers Weekly* commented, "[The] story, for all its triteness and predictability, will no doubt be popular, for the prolific author has legions of fans."

OTHER WORKS BY BEVERLY CLEARY

Fiction

Henry Huggins (1950)
Ellen Tebbits (1951)
Henry and Beezus (1952)
Otis Spofford (1953)
Henry and Ribsy (1954)
Beezus and Ramona (1955)
Fifteen (1956)
Henry and the Paper Route (1957)
The Luckiest Girl (1958)
Jean and Johnny (1959)
Emily's Runaway Imagination (1961)
Henry and the Clubhouse (1962)
Sister of the Bride (1963)
Ribsy (1964)
The Mouse and the Motorcycle (1965)
Mitch and Amy (1967)
Ramona the Pest (1968)
Runaway Ralph (1970)
Ramona the Brave (1975)

Ramona and Her Father (1977)
Ramona and Her Mother (1979)
Ramona Quimby, Age 8 (1981)
Ralph S. Mouse (1982)
Dear Mr. Henshaw (1983)
Ramona Forever (1984)
Lucky Chuck (1984)
The Ramona Quimby Diary (1984)
The Beezus and Ramona Diary (1986)
Janet's Thingamajigs (1987)
The Growing-Up Feet (1987)
Muggie Maggie (1990)
Strider (1991)

Nonfiction

A Girl from Yamhill: A Memoir (1988)
My Own Two Feet: A Memoir (1995)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sime, Richard and Laura Mongello, eds. *Elements of Literature*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2000. pp. 706-710.
 "Socks." *Children's Literature Review*. Vol. 8. p. 54
 "Socks." *Children's Literature Review*. Vol. 2. p. 51
 "Beverly Cleary." *Children's Literature Review*. Vol. 2. p. 44.
 "About the Author." *Beverly Cleary Online*. 12 March 2001. <amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/b.../105-8167615-127670>
 "Beverly Cleary." *Student Resource Center Biography Display*. The Gale Group. Online. 12 March 2001.
 OPAC. Gonzales Junior High School Library

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss sibling rivalry
2. To evaluate the amount of care required by a newborn baby
3. To identify different attitudes of people toward pets in the house
4. To sympathize with the main character's plight
5. To recognize the amount of care pets require to thrive

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the relationship between Debbie and George
2. To discuss the relationship between Socks and his family
3. To list, discuss, and evaluate Nana's concerns about Socks being in the house with the baby
4. To recognize the things Socks did in order to get attention
5. To visualize the story's action
6. To identify the parallels in the lives of Debbie and George, the three children who first wanted Socks, and Socks and Charles William

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

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

motivation the reasons a character behaves in a certain way. Among the many reasons for a person's behavior are feelings, experiences, and commands by others. It is sometimes difficult to pinpoint a character's motivation because it is often inferred instead of stated, but there are always clues. For example, on page 23, George takes Socks from Debbie and puts him in the mailbox to keep the quarreling children from buying him. Until this point, the reader had no indication that George cared about Socks. The clue comes later when George asks, "You didn't want a bunch of fighting kids to get him, did you? You want him to go to a good

home, don't you?" This is evidence of his motivation.

imagery language that appeals to the senses. Most images are visual - that is, they create pictures in the reader's mind by appealing to the sense of sight. Images can also appeal to the senses of hearing, touch, taste, and smell, or even to several senses at once. On pages 90-91 Mrs. Cleary creates images that appeal to the sense of touch. ("Mrs. Risley...found Socks's brush in the laundry and went to work brushing him with long, hard strokes. Socks stood with his back braced and his chin raised, luxuriating in the tingle the brush brought to his skin....With a tip of her finger she rubbed his nose where the hair grew short and flat. How good it felt!")

theme the general idea of insight about life that a work of literature reveals. A theme is not the same as a subject. The subject of a work can usually be expressed in a word or two: *love, childhood, death*. A theme is an idea or message that the writer wishes to convey about that subject. For example, one theme of *Socks* was that pets are an important part of the family and should not be ignored or neglected. A work's themes (there may be more than one) are usually not stated directly. Usually the reader has to think about all the elements of the work and **infer**, or make an educated guess, about what the themes are.

characters people or animals in a story, a play, or another literary work. Socks is the main character in the novel. Characters can be rounded where the author reveals both good points and bad points of the character's personality. An example of a rounded character is Mrs. Bricker. Or characters can be stereotyped where the author makes them fit into a mold without really revealing much of the character's personality to the reader. Nana is a stereotyped character. She is presented as prim, fussy, and disapproving - a "stick-in-the-mud" granny.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

Fiction

Rita Kerr, *The Alamo Cat*
Judy Delton, *Back Yard Angel*
Mary Stoltz, *Cat Walk*
Ursula Le Guin, *Catwings*
James Howe, *The Celery Stalks at Midnight*
Janet Taylor Lisle, *The Dancing Cats of Applesap*
Jean Richardson, *Dino, the Dingbat Cat*
Sarah Ellis, *A Family Project*
Charlotte Towner Graeber, *Fudge*
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *The Grand Escape*
Judie Angell, *A Home is to Share—and Share—and Share*
Jane Wagner, *J. T.*
Peter Parnall, *Marsh Cat*
James Howe, *Nighty-Nightmare*
Phyllis Anderson Wood, *Pass Me a Pine Cone*
William H. Hooks, *Pioneer Cat*
Marion Dane Bauer, *A Question of Trust*
Peg Kehret, *Searching for Candlestick Park*
Georgess McHargue, *See You Later, Crocodile*
Helen Moss, *Silky: The Woods Cat*
Stella Pevsner, *Sister of the Quints*
Alison Cragin Herzig, *The Ten-Speed Babysitter*
Jerry Spinelli, *Who Put that Hair in My Toothbrush?*
Kevin Henkes, *The Zebra Wall*

Non-Fiction

Jon Messmann, *Choosing a Pet*

Michael Allaby, *Your Cat's First Year*

James Herriot, *Moses the Kitten*

James Herriot, *Oscar, Cat-About-Town*

Internet

"About Cats" <www.cats.about.com/pets/cats/>

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Beverly Cleary's *Socks* should include these aspects:

Themes

- family love
- protection
- sibling rivalry
- jealousy
- inclusion
- coping with life's changes
- dealing with bullies
- human/pet relationships

Motifs

- families work together even if they don't always get along
- pets and babies require protection
- sibling competition for parents' attention
- people are sometimes even jealous of those they love
- being excluded by loved ones is a painful emotional experience
- major changes in family make-up can affect the entire household
- difficulty in dealing with bullies
- the qualities that pets add to people's lives
- the responsibilities of pet owners to their pets

MEANING STUDY

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

1. He was especially happy when he could interrupt her work on the papers that she typed for students. Her typewriter was his rival for her attention, and Socks did not like rivals. (Chap. 1, p. 34)
(*Socks was used to getting his way. The Brickers attended to his every need. He was used to being pampered and spoiled, and that was what he expected. He was the center of the household.*)
2. In the days that followed, Mr. Bricker dumped food into Sock's dish early in the morning before he left the house and again at night after he returned, but in between Socks was alone....Socks lost interest in food. His ping-pong ball no longer amused him. Without love he was bewildered and dejected. (Chap. 2, p. 39-40)
(*Once Socks became accustomed to all the love and attention the Brickers piled upon him, he was confused when they quit doting on him. He lost interest in the things he had once enjoyed; he lost the focus and the meaning of his life.*)
3. Socks needed every drop of consolation he could get. His owners loved the baby more than they loved him. (Chap. 2, p. 54)
(*When the Brickers returned from the hospital with Charles William, they doted on him and paid more attention to him than they did to Socks. This was not what Socks was used to. When he was unable to regain their attention by drawing it*

away from the baby, he felt sad and confused.)

4. The Brickers not only refused to give Socks all he wanted to eat, they insisted that he exercise. Mr. Bricker tied a wad of cellophane to the end of a string and dragged it around the carpet for Socks to chase. (Chap. 4, p. 77)
(Although the Brickers were worried about Socks' health and were doing what they thought was best for him, he felt as if he were being punished.)
5. Gradually the purrs petered out, and with a final sigh Socks fell into a deep sleep, the first perfect sleep he had enjoyed since Charles William had been carried home from the hospital. Mrs. Risley loved him more than she loved his rival. (Chap. 4, p. 95)
(This gets to the root of the problem. Socks is jealous of Charles William. He sees the baby as the reason for his unhappiness, and he is content when he feels that he is more important than Charles William.)
6. "Beat it, you cat," said Mr. Bricker, as he reached for a carton of half-and-half. "We can't have a cat that bites in this house." (Chap. 5, p. 119)
(The stress of having Nana in the house, of her disapproval of Socks being in the house with Charles William, of Socks tearing up her wig, of the Brickers oversleeping and rushing to get ready, and of Socks biting Mrs. Bricker on the ankle was more than the family could take. They didn't stop to think that Socks was just nipping at her to get his share of the attention. In the middle of a stressful situation, Mrs. Bricker felt he might be a threat to Charles William and had Mr. Bricker put him out the back door. This was the beginning of Socks becoming an outside cat.)
7. "Socks needs us," his mother called to him. "You'll have to wait." (Chap. 6, p. 135)
(After his fight with Old Taylor, Socks was brought back into the house and cared for. This was the first time since Charles William came home from the hospital that his parents had put Socks' needs ahead of his.)
8. Socks returned his gaze to Mrs. Bricker, who picked up Brown Bear and set him in the crib. With a smile, she reached over to stroke Socks's fur, giving him permission to stay with Charles William. (Chap. 7, p. 156)
(Since the day the Brickers brought Charles William home from the hospital, Mrs. Bricker worried that Socks might harm him. This incident signals her acceptance that Socks will not harm her baby and her willingness to let Socks be near him.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following question 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 1-6 (Literal Level)

1. Why did George and Debbie's father decide that they should both give away kittens?
(George thought the kittens were Debbie's because she played with them. Debbie thought they were George's because he brought the kittens' mother home when she was a kitten. At breakfast they were arguing about who should have to sell them; Debbie argued that she didn't know how to make change. Their father decided they would both sell

them.)

2. Describe some of the things Mrs. Risley did to pamper Socks.
(She called him "Skeezix" and scratched him behind his ears when she first arrived. Later she found his brush, brushed his fur, talked to him tenderly, and rubbed his nose with the tip of her finger. She fed him part of her meat patty and let him lie in her perfect lap. She stroked the fur on his trusting belly and talked about feeling sorry for him because he felt left out.)
3. Who is Nana and what is her relationship to the Brickers?
(Nana is Mr. Bricker's mother. That makes her Mrs. Bricker's mother-in-law and Charles William's grandmother.)
4. What are some reasons Nana gives for not wanting Socks to live in the house?
(Nana says that some babies are allergic to cats and that Socks might scratch Charles William. If Socks scratched himself, she worried he might have fleas that would bite Charles William.)
5. Who is Old Taylor and why is Socks afraid of him?
(Old Taylor is the cat who lived across the back fence. He was a larger, older tom cat who was an experienced fighter. It was generally understood that if Socks challenged him, he would beat up Socks.)
6. What was the first word Charles William said? What did he mean?
(The first word Charles William spoke that meant something was "ticky." He meant kitty because he was talking about Socks.)

Questions 7-8 (Interpretative Level)

7. How would you describe the relationship between Debbie and George?
(Debbie and George got along like most siblings, they argued a lot. George was older, and he thought Debbie was a stupid little sister. He was embarrassed to have to sell kittens with her. Debbie looked up to George; he knew how to do things that she did not. But when the quarrelling brood of children wanted to take Socks, George solved the problem by putting the kitten in the mailbox. He would never have admitted it earlier, but he didn't want Debbie to have to sell Socks to a family who wouldn't provide him with a good home.)
8. Why do Mr. and Mrs. Bricker ignore Socks once Charles William comes home from the hospital?
(They are first-time parents. All their attention and energy are focused on their baby. Socks was older; they took it for granted that he could just take care of himself.)

Questions 9-10 (Critical Level)

9. In what ways does the woman wearing the muumuu dress fit the stereotype of a bad mother?
(She looks bedraggled. The physical description of her makes her seem lazy, like she didn't spend the energy to make herself look presentable. She doesn't seem authoritative enough to tell her children no even though she obviously doesn't need a kitten to care for. Her children are argumentative and seem to have few manners.)
10. What can readers learn from Socks' experiences?

(The reader can learn that there are positive and negative ways to deal with major changes in life and the stressful situations that sometimes go with those changes. Readers should recognize that even though Socks was not the center of the Bricker household once Charles William came home from the hospital, that his family still loved him. He did several negative things in an effort to regain their attention that only caused him more trouble.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Create a wall mural of the scene where Charles William was throwing cotton and Socks was playing with it as it floated through the air. Use three-dimensional objects and glue them to your mural.
12. Write a story telling of an adventure Charles William and Socks had when Charles William was five years old.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art, Music, and Dance

1. Create costumes for Mr. Bricker, Mrs. Bricker, Socks, Charles William, Nana, and Mrs. Risley.
2. Create a wall mural of the most important scenes from the book. Draw the characters in each scene; have them wearing the costumes you created.
3. Choreograph a dance for Socks as he plays with the cotton Charles William is throwing in the air. Be sure to include slipping and sliding (in the spilled milk) and leaps and pounces. Socks's costume could be worn by students who act out this scene.

Language Arts

1. Take your favorite scenes from the book and write them into a manuscript for a play. Use the costumes created in art class and produce your own play.
2. Rewrite some of the scenes from other characters' point-of-view. (For example, the scene where Mrs. Bricker couldn't get into Charles William's room could be written from her point-of-view and that would be entirely different from Socks' point-of-view.) Write a manuscript for these scenes and act them out in class.
3. Write a paper describing Socks' feelings:
 - a. the day Charles William came home from the hospital,
 - b. the day he bit Mrs. Bricker on the ankle
 - c. the day he was allowed to sleep in the crib next to Charles William.

Math

1. Check the labels of three different brands of baby formula to determine how many calories are in 8 ounces of each brand. Determine an average of these three.
2. Check the labels of three different brands of dry cat food to determine how many calories are in 8 ounces of each brand. Determine an average of these three.

Science

1. Research how cats groom themselves (autogrooming). Write a paper explaining your findings.
2. Research the number of calories an adult male cat needs each day. Then use that information and the results from your math projects to create a healthy meal plan for an adult male cat.

Social Studies

1. Research the history of cats to determine when they were

first domesticated. Report your findings to your teacher.

2. Make a list of some historically famous people who have owned cats. (Most U.S. Presidents have owned pets while living in the White House; that would be a good place to start.)

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Create a mural of the scene in Charles William's bedroom where he was throwing cotton out of his crib for Socks to play with.
2. Do a presentation about your own pet or one of your friends' pets. Explain what it is that makes this pet special to his or her family. Include photographs or your own original artwork as a visual aid.
3. Tell what parts of the novel you thought were the most humorous and how the humor added to your enjoyment of the novel.
4. Explain the novel's theme or message.
5. Identify the point-of-view of this novel. Explain why that is an effective way to tell this story.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

1. Make a character list and describe each character.
2. Retell, in summary, the events of the novel in chronological order.
3. Compile a list of events that made Socks feel like the Brickers had stopped loving him.
4. Explain the basic responsibilities of pet owners toward their pets.

VOCABULARY TEST

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

- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. with good manners | f. feeling or mood | k. arguing | p. blame to make feel ashamed |
| b. market or sale | g. get back | l. boxing opponent | q. refused to give up |
| c. small portion | h. twisted or curved | m. gave in | r. hard to please; irritable |
| d. perfectly clean | i. unorganized | n. comforted | s. taking great pleasure |
| e. worry | j. lifted or raised | o. competition | t. chuckled and snorted |

- ___ 1. Their father said, "Stop **bickering**, you two. You can both sell them," and that was that.
- ___ 2. The baby **chortled** and tossed out a bigger piece of cotton for Socks to pounce upon.
- ___ 3. Her typewriter was his **rival** for her attention, and Socks did not like rivals.
- ___ 4. He was filled with jealousy and anger and a terrible **anxiety**.
- ___ 5. Socks turned his back until he made up his mind how to **regain** the lap from the new pet.
- ___ 6. He **hoisted** his hind leg and went to work on his toes while he observed all that was going on.
- ___ 7. He yearned to be held and stroked and **reassured**.
- ___ 8. The **atmosphere** of the room had changed from one of anxiety to one of joy.
- ___ 9. They were all interested in the brown corduroy bear that his mother had bought at a church **bazaar**.
- ___ 10. The bear was going to make a good **sparring partner**, and Socks could not wait to get at it.
- ___ 11. Socks **tactfully** led the way to the refrigerator. "Mommy, Socks is hungry!"
- ___ 12. Socks gave Tiffy a look of **reproach**. How could she disappoint him like this?
- ___ 13. Socks walked out with his tail erect and **quirked** at the tip like a question mark.
- ___ 14. Socks stood with his back braced and his chin raised, **luxuriating** in the tingle the brush brought to his skin.
- ___ 15. When Mrs. Risley cooked and ate her meat patty, she served Socks a **morsel**. "Just enough so you won't feel left out."
- ___ 16. "But aren't you afraid the cat might scratch the baby?" **persisted** Nana, glancing at the frayed corner of the chair where Socks sharpened his claws.
- ___ 17. Socks looked, but not for long. Grooming his **immaculate** white paws was more important.
- ___ 18. "Everything is so **hectic** because we forgot to set the alarm—"
- ___ 19. Socks meowed **peevishly** to let his owners know he was cross, hungry, and unfairly treated.
- ___ 20. Mrs. Bricker always **relented**. "All right, you two," she said.

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. Use each name only once.

- | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| a. Debbie | c. Socks | e. Mrs. Bricker | g. Charles William | i. Tiffy |
| b. George | d. Mr. Bricker | f. Nana | h. Mrs. Risley | j. Old Taylor |

- _____ 1. lady Socks nipped on the ankle
- _____ 2. cat who was jealous of Charles William
- _____ 3. boy who put Socks in the mailbox to keep him from going to a bad home
- _____ 4. person who took college classes and had a job in the University library
- _____ 5. little girl who lived next door to the Brickers and tried to feed Socks chocolate pudding
- _____ 6. little girl who sold Socks to the Brickers
- _____ 7. baby who threw cotton out of his crib and laughed as Socks played with it
- _____ 8. cat that Socks was afraid of
- _____ 9. lady whose wig Socks attacked
- _____ 10. babysitter who made Socks feel loved and appreciated

Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

Write one or more words in each blank to make each statement true.

1. _____ was Debbie's favorite kitten, and she wanted him to go to a good home.
2. In order to keep the arguing family from getting Socks, George put him _____.
3. The Brickers fed Socks the leftover _____ after Charles William was full.
4. Aunt Cassie said Socks was _____ and that was not healthy.
5. _____ called Socks "Skeezix" and made him feel special.
6. Nana was worried that Charles William might be allergic to _____.
7. One night while Nana was sleeping, Socks pounced upon her _____, knocked it on the floor, then batted it around.
8. When Charles William said "ticky" he was trying to say _____.
9. Old Taylor slept on the _____ and Socks stayed away from it when Old Taylor was there.
10. When Charles William rocked his crib next to the door and blocked it, Mrs. Bricker got into the room by using _____.

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each phrase below with a reason or justification.

1. The woman with the arguing children was glad not to have to take Socks because
2. The Brickers spoiled Socks and made him the center of their household because
3. Socks was jealous of Charles William because
4. Socks thought Mrs. Risley was wonderful because
5. Nana didn't want Socks around Charles William because
6. The Brickers made Socks become an outside cat because
7. Socks begged for food from the neighbors because
8. Socks finally challenged Old Taylor because
9. Charles William kept throwing cotton out of his crib because
10. Mrs. Bricker finally allowed Socks in the crib with Charles William because

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the relationship between Debbie and George.
2. Compare and contrast Nana and Mrs. Risley
3. Analyze why Socks felt sorry for himself after Charles William came home from the hospital.
4. Explain Nana's feelings toward Socks.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: True or False (20 points)

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

- ___ 1. Debbie and George only had one kitten to sell.
- ___ 2. George did not want Socks to go to a bad home.
- ___ 3. When Socks was a kitten he was only allowed to sleep in the Brickers' laundry room.
- ___ 4. The Brickers were never afraid to leave Socks alone with Charles William.
- ___ 5. Socks' favorite treat was left-over roast.
- ___ 6. Nana did not think Socks should continue to live in the house since Charles William was there.
- ___ 7. Socks thought Mrs. Risley loved him more than she loved his rival.
- ___ 8. The Brickers made Socks an outside cat because he scratched Charles William.
- ___ 9. Tiffy tried to feed Socks, but he did not like the things she offered him.
- ___ 10. At the end of the book, Charles William and Socks had started to become friends.

Part II: Sentence Completion: (20 points)

Write one or two words in each blank to make each statement true.

- 1. George and Debbie were standing in front of the _____ store trying to sell Socks.
- 2. Before Charles William was born, Mrs. Bricker's _____ was Socks' only rival for her attention.
- 3. Uncle Walter, Aunt Cassie, and Mike gave Charles William a stuffed bear that was named _____.
- 4. After Aunt Cassie said Socks was too fat, the Brickers stopped giving him the left-over _____.
- 5. Mrs. Risley put _____ on Charles William's foot to keep him entertained.
- 6. Mrs. Risley brushed and petted Socks and let him sleep on _____.
- 7. Mrs. Bricker cleaned the house before _____ came to visit.
- 8. After Old Taylor beat up Socks, _____ brought him inside and took care of him.
- 9. Charles William's first word was _____.
- 10. Charles William threw cotton out of his crib so _____ could play with it.

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of the sentences.

1. George did not want to sell kittens with Debbie, but (Mrs. Risley, his father) made him.
2. In order to keep Socks from going to a bad home, George put him (in the garage, in the mailbox).
3. Mr. Bricker (refused to pay, paid 50 cents) for Socks.
4. Socks liked to sit on Mrs. Bricker's (swing, lap).
5. Socks thought Charles William was a (doll, new pet) when the Brickers brought him home from the hospital.
6. Mrs. Risley treated Socks (kindly, badly).
7. Socks was afraid of (Charles William, Old Taylor).
8. Charles William called Socks (Ticky, Docks).
9. (Tiffany, Nana) tried to give Socks Hawaiian Punch.
10. Socks tore up Nana's (nightgown, wig).

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Write a letter from Nana to her best friend telling about Charles William and Socks.
2. Explain why Socks was jealous of Charles William.
3. List the things that Mrs. Risley did to make Socks feel special and explain why these things were so important to Socks.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

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

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Socks | 6. cats or Socks |
| 2. the mailbox | 7. wig |
| 3. baby formula | 8. kitty |
| 4. too fat | 9. fence |
| 5. Mrs. Risley | 10. a ladder or the window |

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

1. she didn't need anything else to take care of
2. they had no children
3. he took Socks's place as the center of the Brickers' household
4. she made him feel that she loved him more than she loved Charles William
5. she thought Charles William might be allergic to cats or that Socks might scratch him
6. he nipped Mrs. Bricker on the ankle and made her bleed
7. the Brickers put him on a diet and he was hungry
8. it challenged his honor for Old Taylor to eat out of his dish
9. he was having fun watching Socks play
10. she realized that Socks wouldn't hurt him

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: True or False (20 points)

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

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. grocery | 6. her lap |
| 2. typewriter | 7. Nana |
| 3. Brown Bear | 8. the Brickers |
| 4. baby formula | 9. Ticky |
| 5. Scotch tape | 10. Socks |

Part III: Multiple choice (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. his father | 6. kindly |
| 2. in the mailbox | 7. Old Taylor |
| 3. paid 50 cents | 8. Ticky |
| 4. lap | 9. Tiffy |
| 5. new pet | 10. wig |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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