



Solo Girl

by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Teacher's Guide

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Solo Girl

Andrea Davis Pinkney



CLASSROOM FAVORITES

A Perma-Bound Production

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

Cass and her family have just moved into a new neighborhood in an unnamed city. Cass lives with her foster mother, Ma Lettie, and her twin brothers, Jackson and Bud. As the best math student in the second grade, Cass had been awarded a silver whistle for winning the end-of-the-year math bee. Although she is a superb math student, Cass is not as skilled with playground games, including kickball, hop-scotch, and jump rope because she has "slow feet." As a result, she shies away from playing with the other kids.

Chapter 2

Cass arrives at Haskins Row and sees the other girls her age playing jump rope. Pearl is especially skilled at jumping the complicated double Dutch. Cass studies Pearl's flying feet with envy, watching her beautiful pink shoelaces fly up with every jump. Pearl and her friends Vicky, Robin, and Tammy all have fast feet so they call themselves the Fast Feet Four. They even have a special jump rope song celebrating their skill. Each one of their complicated steps has a name, such as Red Bean 'n Rice, the Skip-Hop Stop, and the High-Fly Pumpkin Pie. Cass is sad because her gift with numbers won't help her push away her shyness or her slow feet. Neither will it help her make friends in this new neighborhood, she thinks.

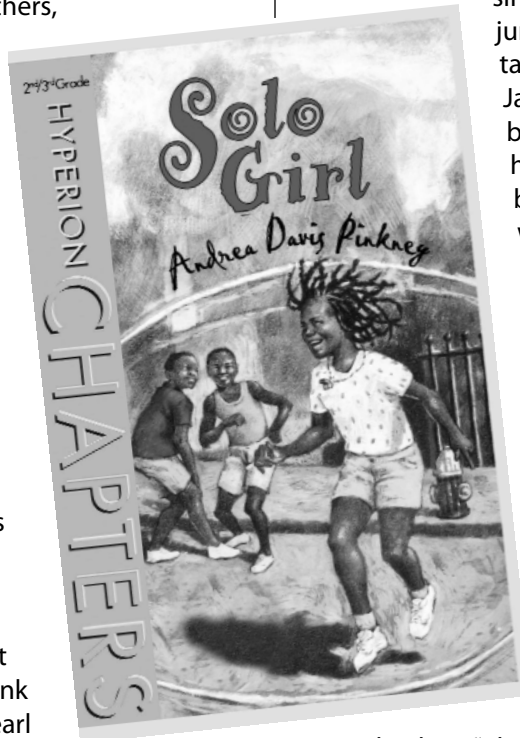
Chapter 3

At supper, Cass tells her brothers Jackson and Bud about the Fast Feet Four. The next day, Cass and her brothers go to Haskins Row to watch the Fast Feet Four let loose with their high-stepping moves. Cass' brothers agree that the Fast Feet Four are excellent jumpers. Later that day, Cass' brothers decide that she needs a

rhyme as the Fast Feet Four have. She thinks their idea is stupid.

Chapter 4

The next day, Jackson and Bud present Cass with a rhyme they're written for her. They've named her "Solo Girl," which she likes very much. Cass sings the rhyme but it doesn't help her jump rope any better; the rope still gets tangled up around her feet. Then Jackson gets a new idea: Cass should blow her whistle as she jumps to help her keep the beat. This works much better, and Cass is able to jump rope without getting all tangled up. She's far from an expert jumper, however.



Chapter 5

The next day, Cass rushes through breakfast to practice jumping rope. Pearl approaches her and explains that she has to attend summer school or she will be a "slow-mo" in math. Pearl shows Cass her collection of beautiful shoe laces. Each one is a complete set, except the purple one, because one lace got lost at the Laundromat. Pearl reads the inscription on Cass'

whistle—"Blessed with the numbers gift"—and sighs with envy. Cass offers to tutor Pearl in math if Pearl will teach her how to double Dutch jump rope. Pearl eagerly agrees.

Chapter 6

Cass explains that when you multiply by five the answer will always end in a zero or a five. Pearl explains how to jump by keeping your ankles steady but your knees flexed. The girls meet for a week and become friends as Pearl learns math and Cass learns how to jump rope.

Chapter 7

Jackson and Budd watch Cass jump a new step, the Belly Bone. Before Cass starts to jump, Pearl gives her the lucky purple shoelace. Cass blows her whistle and starts to jump.

Chapter 8

Cass jumps well and the other girls ask her to join the group. They rename the group the Fast Feet Five. Jackson and Bud write a new rhyme for the girls that includes Solo Girl.

Appendix

The appendix contains a series of puzzle pages in different formats.

Background on Jumping Rope

As a kid's game, it's called "jump-rope," "skip rope," or "skipping." To people not familiar with the sport, jumping in and out of a twirling hunk of clothesline is often associated with the girls' corner of the playgrounds, the city streets, and the back yards of North America. This is not the case, however, in America or around the world.

Scholars have discovered that jumping rope is likely a very ancient game originally played by boys. By the mid-19th century, children were warned about "instances of blood vessels burst by young ladies who, in a silly attempt to jump a certain number of hundred times, have persevered in jumping after their strength was exhausted."

Today, there's a renewed interest in jumping rope for fun and physical fitness. For example, many boxers (including Muhammad Ali in his prime) use a jump rope as part of their training. There is also a new emphasis on competition in jump rope because it helps build endurance, stamina, and agility. It's also fun!

Timeline

Beginning

Cass and her family—her foster mother and twin brothers—have just moved to a new neighborhood in the city. A gifted math student, Cass nevertheless fears she won't fit in because she has "slow feet"—she is slow at sports, including rope-jumping.

Then

Cass watches other girls jump double-dutch. She especially notices Pearl, a gifted jumper. Cass' brothers decide she needs her own jumping rhyme, like the girls in the Fast Feet Four. They make up one, called "Solo Girl," for Cass; the rhyme helps her jump much better, although she's still slow.

Later

Cass and Pearl become friends. Pearl is

going to have to go to summer school if she doesn't pass math; the girls work out a deal whereby Cass tutors Pearl in math, and Pearl teaches Cass to jump well.

Finally

Cass becomes good enough to join the Fast Feet Four, now renamed the Fast Feet Five.

Author Sketch

Andrea Davis Pinkney was born in 1963 in Washington, D.C. and raised in Connecticut. After earning her B.A. in journalism from Syracuse University in 1985, Pinkney began a career as an editor and children's book writer. She has been an editor at Scholastic in New York City; a senior editor at *Essence* magazine; and a children's book editor at Hyperion Books for Children. Currently, Pinkney is the executive editor at Hyperion Books for Children. She is married to the Caldecott award-winning children's book illustrator Brian Pinkney and they have one child. Brian Pinkney often illustrates his wife's novels.

As *Solo Girl* demonstrates, Pinkney's writing celebrates the heritage of African Americans. During her editorial career, Pinkney has championed African American authors by publishing the works of Julius Lester, Quincy Troupe, Toni Morrison, and Veronica Chambers as well as her own fiction and nonfiction.

Pinkney often writes about famous African Americans. Alvin Ailey, Pinkney's first biography, describes the life of the ground-breaking dancer and choreographer who established an internationally-known black dance company. A meticulous researcher, Pinkney met with Ailey's mother and several family members to get the details she needed to bring Ailey to life. Praising Alvin Ailey in her *Five Owls* review, critic Leslie Tryon commented that the biography "makes a strong point for where an artist finds profound inspiration—where one artistic genius found one very powerful idea." *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra* describes the life of the famous jazz musician. In *School Library Journal*, critic Beth Tegart described the writing as "a swiny conversational tone. . . carr[ying] the auditory experiences of the Duke's music right off the page."

In *Dear Benjamin Banneker*, Pinkney traces Banneker's career as a tobacco farmer, astronomer, and publisher. In her *Bulletin of the Center for Children Books* review, Deborah Stevenson called *Dear Benjamin Banneker* "a

compact evocation of the integrity and talent of a man who rose above the constraints of his era.”

Pinkney drew from her own family's African American tradition in *Seven Candles for Kwanzaa*, as she describes this week-long holiday celebration. *Seven Candles* presents not only the day-to-day rituals making up the Kwanzaa tradition, but also the holiday's origin, the beliefs it incorporates, and the Swahili terms used to describe its many aspects. Roger Sutton praised the book in *Booklist* as a “simple” and “friendly introduction to what still may be a ‘new’ holiday to both children and adults.”

Pinkney writes for a variety of age groups. In *Shake, Shake, Shake*, part of a four-volume series for toddlers, Pinkney tells the story of a family making music to introduce young listeners to shekere, a percussive instrument from Africa. In *Watch Me Dance*, rhythm again plays a prominent role, this time through the dance steps created by a young girl performing for her little brother.

Pinkney also writes young-adult novels based on her personal experiences as a pre-teen. In *Hold Fast to Dreams*, main character Deirdre Willis moves from Baltimore to the suburbs of Connecticut and becomes the only black student in the Wexford Middle School. Nicknamed “Camera Dee” because of her passion for photography, twelve-year-old Dee finds that her talent as well as her personal determination enable her to fit into her new surroundings. *New York Times Book Review* critic Enola G. Aird called the novel “a solid, believable tale about a loving and supportive family.” Jacqueline Rose noted in her review for *School Library Journal* that *Hold Fast to Dreams* is “a positive portrait of strong relationships with characters that are likable, if a bit too ideal.”

Critic's Corner

In the St. James Guide to Children's Writers, critic Janelle B. Mathis commented on Pinkney's dedication and overall contribution to children's literature. Mathis especially praised Pinkney's “rich descriptions of people, historical and geographical eras, the movement and emotional quality of various arts, and the use of colorful language variations that vividly convey [Pinkney's] . . . message. Without sacrificing the complexity or authenticity of the lives she shares, Pinkney makes her work accessible to young readers.”

Pinkney has received many awards for her writing. For example, *Seven Candles for Kwanzaa* won the Best Arts Feature award and Highlights for Children Foundation in 1992 and the *Parenting* Publication award, Pick of the List designation, as well as the American Bookseller's Award in 1993. *Dear Benjamin Banneker* was awarded the Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies in 1994. *Bill Picket: Rodeo-Ridin ' Cowboy* earned a Notable Book citation from the Society of School Librarians International and a Notable Book citation American Library Association in 1996. *Duke Ellington* won the Coretta Scott King award in 1999.

Selected Other Works by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Nonfiction

Alvin Ailey (1993)
Seven Candles for Kwanzaa (1993)
Dear Benjamin Banneker (1994)
Bill Picket: Rodeo-Ridin ' Cowboy (1996)
Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra (1998)

Fiction

Hold Fast to Dreams (1995)
I Smell Honey (1997)
Pretty Brown Face (1997)
Solo Girl (1997)
Shake, Shake, Shake (1997)
Watch Me Dance (1997)
Raven in a Dove House (1998)
Silent Thunder (1999)
Belly-hum Christmas (2000)

Poetry

(Selector) *Paul Laurence Dunbar Jump Back, Honey* (1999)

Bibliography

Booklist, Oct. 1, 1993, p. 55; Nov. 1, 1996, p. 504; Feb. 15, 1998, p. 1000; June 1, 1998, p. 1757.
Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, November 1994, p. 100; May 1995, p. 320.
Contemporary Authors Online. Gale Group, 2000.
 Edustation Web site, <disney.go.com/education/feature_bio_adp.html>, June 7, 1999.
Five Owls, January/February 1994, p. 60.
Horn Book, March/April 1994, p. 221.
Kirkus Reviews, Oct. 15, 1994, p. 1414; Feb. 15, 1998, p. 272.
New York Times Book Review, June 4, 1995, p. 29; Nov. 10, 1996, p. 42.

Publishers Weekly, Feb. 2, 1998, p. 91.
School Library Journal, October 1993, p. 47; November 1994, p. 100; April 1995, p. 136; October 1996, p. 116; May 1998, p. 136.
St. James Guide to Children Writers, St. James Press, 1999.
"Andrea David Pinkney at Scholastic.com,"
<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=2861>

General Objectives

1. To analyze the importance of fitting in with peers
2. To assess each character's personality
3. To recognize the novel's theme
4. To appreciate the importance of cooperation and sharing
5. To understand the novel's title
6. To explore the ways kindness can be shown
7. To find examples of hard work
8. To sympathize with the main character's loneliness and isolation
9. To describe the novel's mood or atmosphere
10. To appreciate the author's use of the poetic elements of rhyme and rhythm

Specific Objectives

1. To understand how Cass feels about moving to a new neighborhood
2. To appreciate the close and loving relationship between Cass and her brothers
3. To probe the relationship between Cass and Pearl
4. To understand Cass' pride in her math ability
5. To explore jumping rope and other childhood pleasures
6. To look into the relationship between Cass and her neighbors
7. To understand the plot structure
8. To see how Cass makes new friends
9. To explore African-American culture
10. To visualize the story's action

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Andrea Davis Pinkney's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Rhyme is the repeated use of identical or nearly identical sounds. End rhyme occurs when words at the end of lines of poetry have the same sound. Lines that end with the words bat, cat, sat, or rat would have end rhyme. Internal rhyme occurs when words within a sentence share the same sound. Here is an example of internal rhyme: "Each narrow cell in which we dwell." Cell and dwell have internal rhyme because they share the same sound and one of the words is set in the mid-

dle of the line. Poets use rhyme to create a musical sound, meaning, and structure. Andrea Davis Pinkney uses end rhyme in the following jump-rope jingle:

*We call ourselves the Fast Feet Five
When we jump, our ropes come alive.
There's Vicky and Robin and Tammy and Pearl
And Cass, who we call Solo Girl!*

"Five" and "alive" rhyme; "Pearl" and "Girl" rhyme.

Rhythm is a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that create a beat, as in music. The meter of a poem is its rhythm. When you read a poem, use the punctuation and capitalization in each line to help you decide where to pause and what words to stress to make the rhythm clear. Andrea Davis Pinkney uses a very strong rhythm in each of the jump-rope jingles, as the following example shows:

*I got a rope, and that's all I need.
I'm trying my best to pick up speed.
I jump alone, while my brothers twirl,
And that's why they call me Solo Girl!*

Conflict in literature is a struggle or fight. Conflict makes a story interesting because readers want to find out the outcome. 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. Stories often contain both external and internal conflicts. *Solo Girl* contains a strong internal conflict, as Cass battles to overcome her shyness.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

- Barbara E. Barber, *Allie's Basketball Dream* and *Allie's Basketball Team*
Jeffrey Dean, *The Amazing Adventures of Abiola*
Virginia Hamilton, *The Bells of Christmas*
Deborah Hopkinson, *A Band of Angels: A Story Inspired by the Jubilee Singers*
Virginia Kroll, *Africa Brothers and Sisters*
Walter Dean Myers, *145th Street: Short Stories*
Denise Lewis Patrick, *The Adventures of Midnight Son*
Connie Rose Porter, *Addy Saves the Day: A SummerStory*, *Addy Little Brother*, *Addy Surprise: A Christmas Story*, and *Addy Learns a Lesson: A School Story*

Afi-Odelia Scruggs, *Jump Rope Magic*
 Martha Southgate, *Another Way to Dance*
 John Steptoe, *Baby Says*

Nonfiction

Zita Allen, *Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement*
 Lucius Jefferson Barker, *African Americans and the American Political System*
 Derrick A. Bell, *Afrolantica Legacies*
 Tonya Bolden, *And Not Afraid to Dare: The Stories of Ten African-American Women*
 Janet P. Cave, Loretta Y. Britten, *African Americans: Voices of Triumph: Perseverance*
 Pamela Duncan Edwards, *Barefoot: Escape on the Underground Railroad*
 Ayanna Hart, *Africans in America*
 Jim Haskins, *Black Eagles: African Americans in Aviation*
 Robert C. Hayden, *9 African-American Inventors*
 Dorothy Hoobler, Thomas Hoobler, *The African American Family Album (American Family Albums Series)*
 Wade Hudson, Valerie Wilson Wesley (Contributor), *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes from A to Z : An Introduction to Important Black Achievers for Young Readers*
 Judson Knight, Lawrence W. Baker (Editor), *African American Biography (African American Reference Library)*
 Julius Lester, *Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story*
 Joan Potter, Constance Claytor, *African Americans Who Were First*
 Richard S. Rennert (Editor), *Civil Rights Leaders (Profiles of Great Black Americans)*
 Richard Scott Rennert, *Biography: 325 Questions Drawn from the Expertise of Harvard's Du Bois Institute*
 Ellen Shnidman, et al., *The African-American Answer Book (Ethnic Answer Books)*
 Irene Smalls-Hector, *Because You're Lucky*
 Ray Spangenburg, Diane K. Moser, *The African American Experience (American Historic Places)*
 Leotha Stanley, *Be a Friend: The Story of African American Music in Song, Words, and Pictures*
 Michael Weber, *The African American Civil Rights Movement (Causes and Consequences)*

Plays/Drama

Useni Eugene Perkins, *Black Fairy and Other Plays for Children*

Internet
 "Dutch Rope Skipping Committee,"
 <www.xs4all.nl/Lakelck/jumprope>
 "Texas A&M Jump Rope Club,"
 <stuact.tamu.edu/stuorgs/jumprope/>
 "Jumperoos and Pure Energy." <www.ortech-engr.com/ljumprope/Jumperoos.html>

CD-ROMs

American Journey: The African-American Experience
 (Primary Source Media)

Videos/DVDs

Images and Realities: African American Children (1998)
 Images and Realities: African American Families (1998)

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Andrea Davis Pinkney's *Solo Girl* should include these aspects:

Themes

- confusion
- cooperation
- family
- love
- foster families
- friendship
- fun
- humor
- hard work
- jumping rope
- loneliness

Motifs

- trying to fit in with others
- the difficulty of learning a new skill
- family love and support
- helping others
- the importance of cooperation
- random acts of kindness
- pride in one's accomplishments
- urban childhood pastimes
- overcoming shyness
- using a beat or rhythm to concentrate better

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. Jackson said, "Little sis, what you need is a beat, like Pearl and her friends have over on Haskins Row." (Chap. 3, p. 16) *(Cass is sad and lonely because the family has moved to a new neighborhood. Since it is summer Cass can't use her math ability to make new friends — or so she thinks. The neighborhood girls are experts at double Dutch jump rope, and Cass feels she has two left feet. Her two brothers, Jackson and Bud, wisely decide that she needs a beat to help her get into the rhythm of jumping.)*
2. Then Jackson got an idea. "Use your whistle, Cass." (Chap. 4, p. 24)
(At the end of second grade last years Cass had been awarded a silver whistle as the top math student. Cass always wears the whistle around her neck. As this passage shows, Jackson gets a great idea: Cass can use the whistle to blow the beat as she jumps. Cass already uses the whistle to blow a beat when she memorizes the multiplication times tables, so the idea has great merit.)
3. I got one rope, and that's all I need.
I'm trying my best to pick up speed.
I jump alone, while my brothers twirl, And that's why they call me Solo Girl! (Chap. 4, p. 26)
(Jackson and Cass want to help their younger sister so much that they even write a jingle for her to sing as she skips rope. The expert jumpers use a jingle to help them keep the beat, so Jackson and Budd figure that the same technique will work for Cass. It is a clever thoughtful gesture.)
4. "I'm a slow-mo with math. That's why I'm in summer school," Pearl said. (Chap. 5, p. 31)
(Cass envies Pearl and her friends because they are so skilled at double Dutch and other difficult jump rope moves. She bemoans her slow, clumsy feet. Cass is surprised, then, to realize that there is something that Pearl can't do—especially math, since it is something that Cass finds very easy.)
5. Pearl bumped her shoulder to Cass. "See, my purple shoelace is bringing me luck. How 'bout this—you teach me math, and I'll teach you double Dutch." (Chap.5, p. 32)
(Pearl comes up with a great idea: She will teach Cass how to do complex jump rope steps if Cass will teach her complex multiplication tables. Pearl's great idea is the beginning of the girls' friendship as Cass emerges from her shell and sheds some of her shyness. Pearl's offer also illustrates one of the book's main themes: the importance of working together to overcome difficulties and learn new skills. Pinkney

- shows how cooperation can lead to friendship.)*
6. "You're almost there," Pearl said. "Thanks to you," said Cass. (Chap. 6, p. 39)
(Cass jumps into the twirling rope and is able to jump ten times before she trips. This is the best she has yet to accomplish. And when she stumbled, it was only slightly. With Pearl's assistance and generous encouragement, Cass has made great progress in learning to double Dutch jump rope. Cass gives all the credit to Pearl, but much of it also goes to Cass hard work and determination.)
 7. Before Cass jumped in, Pearl pulled the purple shoelace from her bunch. "Use this to wear your whistle," Pearl said. (Chap. 7, p. 44)
(Cass envies Pearl's shoelaces, pairs in bright colors that toss as Pearl jumps rope. Only the purple shoelace is a singleton, since the matching lace was lost at the Laundromat. Pearl has made the solo lace her good luck charm. Giving it to Cass is a gesture of great generosity and it signals the beginning of a true friendship between the girls.)
 8. Quick as a match spark, Cass jumped in. She jumped slowly at first. But she blew her whistle to find the double-time beat of the two ropes. (Chap. 8, p. 46)
(Through her determination and Pearl's instruction, Cass has mastered the difficult double Dutch jump rope steps. Soon, the ropes are twirling so fast that they become a blur over Cass head. Her feet don't sag and her ankles are strong enough to support her. Watching from the side, Cass' brothers urge her on.)
 9. Vicky said, "We can always use new jumpers." (Chap. 8, p. 48)
(As Cass jumps, everyone cheers her on. After the jump, people offer even more kind words of praise. Vicky, one of the core group of jumpers, is so impressed with Cass ' performance that she invites her to join the group. The other girls echo Vicky 's invitation. Cass is thrilled: now she will have some friends in her new neighborhood!)
 10. We call ourselves the Fast Feet Five.
When we jump, our ropes come alive.
There's Vicky and Robin and Tammy and Pearl
And Cass, who we call Solo Girl! (Chap.8, p. 51)
(The girls have modified their chant to include Cass as a member of the group. It is her crowning moment of glory, and very well deserved.)

Comprehension Study

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

answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the novel take place?
(The novel is set in a fictional urban neighborhood. Most of the residents are African-American. The time is the present.)
2. What is Cass' special talent?
(She is an exceptional math student, the top student in her grade—the second grade—and more skilled at math than most third graders, including her brothers Jackson and Bud. She knows the multiplication tables backwards and forwards, as sure as she knows her own name. Cass' foster mother Ma Lettie says that Cass is "blessed with the numbers gift.")
3. What skill does she want to learn? Why?
(Cass wants to learn how to do fancy jump rope steps, especially double Dutch. She has just moved into the neighborhood and does not know anyone her own age yet. Further since it is summer vacation, she will not have the opportunity to meet anyone in school until the fall. She wants to learn to jump rope so she can be part of the group of girls her own age who jump rope every day on Haskins Row)
4. How do Cass' brothers try to help her?
(Cass' brothers Jackson and Bud try to help her learn to jump rope in many ways. First, they wisely decide that she needs a beat to help her get into the rhythm of the jump so they suggest that she use the whistle she won for her math prowess to toot out the beat. Then they write her a jumping rhyme. Not only does it provide a beat, but it also helps bolster her self-esteem.)
5. According to Cass, how can you remember the products of multiplying by five?
(Cass explains that when you multiply by five, every answer ends with a zero or a five. And the numbers ending with zero or five alternate. Thus, five times 1 is five, which ends with 5; five times 2 is ten, which ends with 0, and so on.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why does Pearl help Cass learn to jump rope?
(Pearl has a selfish reason: she needs Cass' help to learn math. By trading skills, Pearl can get some tutoring. She is also selfless, however extending her help to Cass because she would like to be her friend. Pearl looks forward to welcoming Cass to the group.)
7. How would you describe the theme or main idea in this novel?
(The novel's theme is the importance of working together to overcome difficulties and learn new

skills. Pinkney shows how cooperation can lead to friendship.)

8. How are Pearl and Cass the same and different from each other?
(Both are third-grade African American girls. They live in the same neighborhood and have many of the same interests. Both are friendly as well. However Cass is shy while Pearl seems more outgoing. In addition, Cass is skilled at math but not as good with playground games such as kick-ball, hopscotch, and jump rope. Pearl is quite good at playground games, but not skilled at math.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Explain how Andrea Davis Pinkney celebrates the heritage of African Americans in *Solo Girl*.
(She describes some of the sports played by urban kids, such as jump rope. In addition, the book shows the values of friendship, family love, cooperation, and community support.)
10. What can readers learn from Cass' experiences?
(Readers can learn the importance of cooperation and reaching out to others. They can also learn that it isn't difficult to master new skills as long as you practice and get some help.)

Questions 11 and 12 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss some ways that you might have coped with Cass' situation had you been in her place.
12. Make a chart that shows the things that Cass likes to do.

Across the Curriculum

Art, Music, and Dance

1. At the back of *Solo Girl* you can find a group of puzzles. Make several more puzzles for the back of the book. Then trade puzzles with a small group of friends.
2. Pearl gives Cass her lucky purple shoe lace. Draw your lucky charm or make one up.
3. Make a new cover for the book. Be ready to explain why your picture fits the book's content.
4. Play or sing some music that would help all the girls jump rope more smoothly. You can play a song that everyone knows or make up your own song.
5. Create a dance that shows how Cass feels when she learns to jump rope and is accepted into the group.

Language Arts

1. Write your own jump rope rhyme. Include at least four lines. Try to make the first and third lines and the second and fourth lines rhyme.
2. Explain what the title means. Then make up your own nice nickname. Explain to a friend why it shows your best qualities.
3. Cass' special gift is math, "the numbers gift" Ma Lettie calls it. Write a poem or letter showing your special gift.
4. Write a new sentence on Cass' whistle to describe one of her other strong talents.
5. The jumpers call themselves the "Fast Feet Four," and when Cass joins the group, The "Fast Feet Five." Make up a new name for the group of five. See if you can start each word in the name with the same letter.
6. The fancy jump rope steps all have silly names, like Belly Bone. Make up three new silly names for jump rope steps and tell why your names fit the steps.

Math

1. Make a chart showing the multiplication tables from 1 to 12.
2. Cass teaches Pearl a great hint for remembering how to multiply by five. Write some hints to help your friends learn how to multiply by other numbers as well.
3. Cass won a silver whistle in the second-grade math bee. As a class, hold a math bee by dividing the class into two teams. Have a moderator ask different math questions to alternating sides. Keep score and award the winner a silver whistle.

Science, Health, and Physical Education

1. Jumping rope is very good for you! List at least four other sports that can help kids stay strong and healthy. Then explain how to play one of these sports.
2. In addition to jumping rope, Cass also has difficulty playing kickball and hopscotch. Organize one of these games and teach the rules to a friend.
3. Working with a partner, explain how to "double Dutch" jump rope. If possible, demonstrate this skill to your friends.
4. Cass tries to leave the house without eating breakfast, until Ma Lettie stops her. Find out why it's important to eat breakfast every morning. Make a poster showing some healthful breakfasts kids like to eat.

Social Studies

1. Make a chart comparing and contrasting your neighborhood to Cass' neighborhood. On the chart, show how the two places are the same and different. Use both words and pictures.
2. Jump rope is very popular in Cass' neighborhood. List some sports and hobbies that are very popular in your neighborhood.
3. Select part of the book that you especially liked and act it out as a skit. Working with friends, take the different parts.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Write a news release announcing that Cass won the second-grade math award.
2. Draw a picture of Cass and label it with all of her good qualities.
3. Create a TV panel discussion debating how people can best learn new skills such as math and jump rope.
4. Draw a character web to identify each character and show the relationship among them.
5. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main events.
6. Briefly explain why Cass wants to learn how to jump rope.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of new skills that you have learned from other people teaching or helping you.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate how Cass is determined and hard working.
3. Compose a scene in which Cass thanks her brothers for all their help.
4. Make a character list and describe each character.

Vocabulary Test

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

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| _____ 1. foster | a. slippery |
| _____ 2. pendant | b. macaroni |
| _____ 3. shrug | c. song |
| _____ 4. muttered | d. encourage |
| _____ 5. rhyme | e. clumsy person |
| _____ 6. inscription | f. quiet |
| _____ 7. bee | g. surrogate |
| _____ 8. shy | h. sounds |
| _____ 9. steady | i. alone |
| _____ 10. cheer | j. grumbled |
| _____ 11. noodles | k. saying |
| _____ 12. hush | l. frying pan |
| _____ 13. twirl | m. necklace |
| _____ 14. dusk | n. twilight |
| _____ 15. klutz | o. bashful |
| _____ 16. solo | p. raise and lower your shoulders |
| _____ 17. gravel | q. contest |
| _____ 18. toots | r. balanced |
| _____ 19. slick | s. spin |
| _____ 20. griddle | t. pebbles |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Supply a term to complete each of the following statements. Place your answers in the blanks provided in the sentences.

1. Cass won a(n) _____ for winning the second-grade math bee.
2. As Pearl jumps rope, Cass admires her two pink _____.
3. The four girls who jump rope call themselves the _____.
4. _____ is the best jumper of the girls.
5. Cass complains that she has _____ so she can't jump rope well.
6. Cass' brothers write a _____ for her to use as she learns to jump rope.
7. Cass' brothers give her the nickname _____ because she jumps alone.
8. Pearl is going to summer school to study _____.
9. Cass teaches Pearl the secret of the _____, a way to remember one of the times tables.
10. The last jump the girls create is called the _____ because they touch their stomachs.

Part II: 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. You will have choices left over.

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| A. Cass | F. Robin and Vicky | K. Ma Lettie |
| B. Pearl | G. Tammy | L. Mrs. Carter |
| C. Jackson and Budd | H. High-Fly Pumpkin Pie | M. Haskins Row |
| D. Dina | I. Andrea Pinkney | N. Shana and Loreen |
| E. T'Aysha and Noel | J. Nick and Sam | O. Park Avenue |

- _____ 1. Cass' foster mother
- _____ 2. the street where the girls jump rope
- _____ 3. a jump rope routine the girls create
- _____ 4. Cass' best friends from her former home
- _____ 5. the author of Solo Girl
- _____ 6. a neighbor who admires the girls' ability to jump rope
- _____ 7. two of the girls who jump rope very well
- _____ 8. Cass' twin brothers
- _____ 9. the girl whom Cass tutors in math
- _____ 10. a shy third-grade African American girl gifted in mathematics

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- _____ 1. Cass is very skilled at hopscotch, soccer, and baseball.
- _____ 2. She is also an excellent swimmer but there is no pool in her neighborhood.
- _____ 3. Red Beans N' Rice and Skip-Hop Stop are jump rope routines the girls created.
- _____ 4. Cass' brothers try to help her learn how to jump rope.
- _____ 5. Pearl always wears special hair barrettes to bring her luck.
- _____ 6. Cass is "blessed with the numbers gift," according to her foster mother.
- _____ 7. Pearl is "blessed with a great sense of humor," according to her father.
- _____ 8. The girls often jump with two ropes at the same time.
- _____ 9. Pearl invites Cass to join the other rope jumpers.
- _____ 10. Cass refuses because she would prefer to work at the ice-cream stand.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Cass and Pearl.
2. Explain how Cass overcomes her shyness and makes friends with the other girls.
3. Describe the skills Cass has and how she uses them.
4. Explain how Cass and Pearl become friends.

Comprehension Test B**Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

Underline the correct word or phrase to complete each of the following statements.

1. (**Pearl, Cass**) was awarded a silver whistle for winning the second-grade math bee.
2. As Pearl jumps rope, Cass admires her two (**purple, pink**) shoelaces.
3. The Fast Feet Four (**jump rope, do math problems**).
4. (**Tammy, Pearl**) is the best jumper of the girls.
5. Cass complains that she has (**big, slow**) feet so she can't jump rope well.
6. Cass' brothers write a (**slogan, rhyme**) for her to use as she learns to jump rope.
7. Cass' brothers give her the nickname (**The One, Solo Girl**) because she jumps alone.
8. Pearl is going to summer school to study (**math, English**)
9. Cass teaches Pearl the secret of the (**fives, fours**), a way to remember one of the times tables.
10. At the end of the book, there are (**three, five**) girls in the jump rope group.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of speakers from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. Cass' twin brothers | A. Cass |
| _____ 2. Cass' close friends in her former neighborhood | B. Pearl |
| _____ 3. The original group of girls who jump rope | C. Jackson and Budd |
| _____ 4. The author of Solo Girl | D. High-Fly Pumpkin Pie |
| _____ 5. The girl who invites Cass to join the group | E. Ma Lettie |
| _____ 6. Cass' foster mother | F. Shana and Loreen |
| _____ 7. the neighbor who admires the girls' skill | G. Mrs. Carter |
| _____ 8. a shy girl who is very good at math | H. Andrea Pinkney |
| _____ 9. the street where the girls jump rope | I. Haskins Row |
| _____ 10. a special jump rope routine the girls create | J. Fast Feet Four |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each of the following is important in the story.

1. Pearl's purple shoelace
2. the whistle
3. jumping rope
4. Solo Girl
5. Cass' feet

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Pearl and Cass, showing how they are the same and different.
2. Explain why Cass is an admirable character.
3. Analyze why Cass wants to learn how to jump rope so much.
4. Describe the story's plot, its main events.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

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

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. whistle | 6. rhyme |
| 2. shoelaces | 7. Solo Girl |
| 3. Fast Feet Four | 8. math |
| 4. Pearl | 9. fives |
| 5. slow feet | 10. belly bone |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. K | 6. L |
| 2. M | 7. F |
| 3. H | 8. C |
| 4. N | 9. B |
| 5. I | 10. A |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Cass | 6. rhyme |
| 2. pink | 7. Solo Girl |
| 3. jump rope | 8. math |
| 4. Pearl | 9. fives |
| 5. slow | 10. five |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

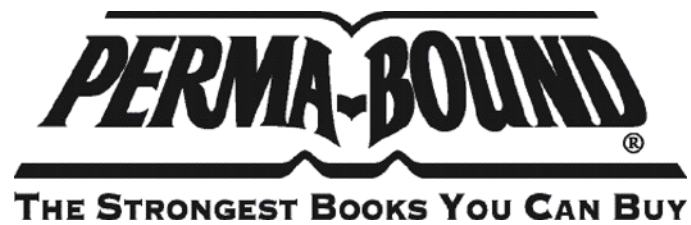
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. E |
| 2. F | 7. G |
| 3. J | 8. A |
| 4. H | 9. I |
| 5. B | 10. D |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. It is Pearl's good luck charm. She gives it to Cass, to bring her luck. Pearl's gesture helps build a closer friendship between the two girls.
2. Cass received the whistle as a math prize. It represents her skill and accomplishment and she is justly proud of it.
3. Jumping rope is a skill Cass desperately wants to master because it will help her make friends in her new neighborhood.
4. This is the nickname Cass' twin brothers give her. It shows that she is still alone.
5. Cass is convinced that she has "slow feet" and will never be able to jump rope without getting herself all tangled. Fortunately, she is wrong and she learns to jump quite well.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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