



# Strider

by Beverly Cleary

## Teacher's Guide

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## CLASSROOM FAVORITES

A Perma-Bound Production

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## Synopsis

[Note: The chapters are designed by dates, not numbers.]

### June 6

While cleaning his room, fourteen-year-old Leigh Botts discovers his old diary and is inspired to start writing again. He is still coping with some of the same challenges from earlier days—his parents' divorce, concerns about his father's sincerity and financial stability, and insecurities about his own identity and popularity. Leigh's father, Bill, is a long-distance trucker who sees Leigh only occasionally. Leigh's mother, Bonnie, has become a vocational nurse and is studying to become a registered nurse. Leigh has a part-time job with Catering by Katy, sweeping floors. He enjoys looking over his old diaries, which he kept after his parents' divorce.

### June 7

Leigh describes his visit to the home of his best friend, Barry Brinkerhoff. The large blended Brinkerhoff family is warm and welcoming and Leigh enjoys visiting them. Leigh and Barry start to assemble a model car and realize they have outgrown models.

### June 8

Barry and Leigh go to the beach and have a brief conversation with a rugged old man they call "Mr. President." They see an abandoned dog sitting patiently. Leigh names the dog "Strider." They leave the beach and go to Leigh's apartment.

### June 9

The boys bring food and water for Strider and coax the dog to follow them home. They call the SPCA, but no one has asked about a dog that matches Strider's

description. The boys decide to keep Strider and share joint custody of him.

### June 10

Even though the landlady Mrs. Smerling doesn't allow dogs, Leigh's mother lets him keep Strider. Leigh and Barry decide to pretend that the dog belongs to Barry alone when they see Mrs. Smerling.

### June 11

Barry's parents agree that Barry can share the dog with Leigh.

### June 16

Barry and Leigh have a lot of fun with Strider. The landlady sees the dog but doesn't say anything.

### June 22

Barry and Leigh build a new "posture dish" for Strider. They try to teach him to read the words "sit" and "stay" as well.

### June 30

Barry leaves to spend a week in Los Angeles with his biological mother and step-father.

### July 8

Leigh and Strider pick up golf balls—until Strider disrupts a golf game!

### July 9

Leigh and Strider have a peaceful, perfect day.

### July 10

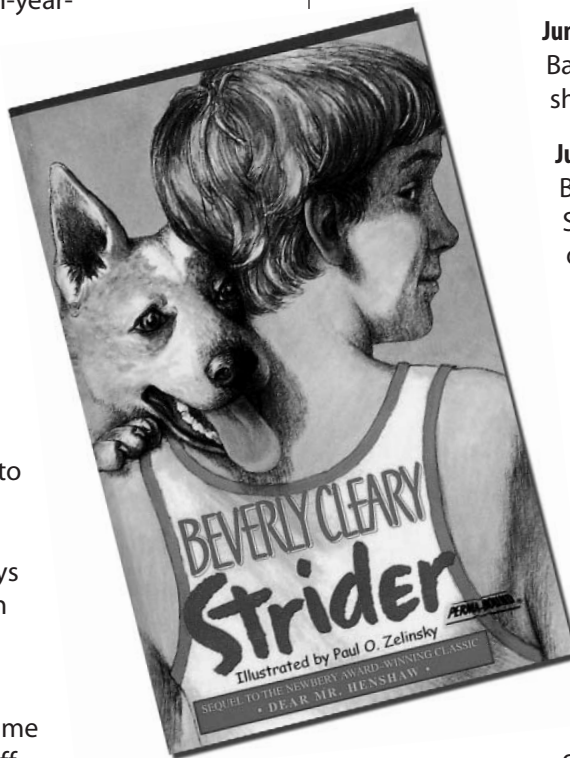
Mrs. Smerling confronts Leigh about Strider. She doesn't forbid him to have the dog, however.

### July 11

Barry sends Leigh a postcard. Leigh wonders if Strider remembers Barry and misses him.

### July 18

Leigh's father comes for a visit. He brings Leigh's old dog, Bandit. Leigh and his father watch TV because they have trouble talking to each other. They go out for lunch



and Leigh tries to pretend they are a real family. Leigh realizes that his father is not pulling a load and worries that his father is having difficulties.

**July 20**

Leigh and his mother go to the Laundromat and then Leigh goes to the thrift store to get a book. A girl from school greets him by name and he is delighted. Leigh returns to the thrift shop and buys the wildly-colored shirt he had admired earlier.

**July 30**

Leigh and Mr. Brinkerhoff pick Barry up at the airport. Barry is thrilled to see his father. Strider doesn't touch his paw to Barry's foot, as he does with Leigh. Leigh is relieved that the dog seems to favor him.

**August 10**

Barry mocks Leigh's new shirt, upsetting Leigh.

**August 19**

Leigh's father invites him to ride with him to Gilroy. They unload the garlic at the dehydrator. Over lunch, Bill pumps Leigh for news about Leigh's mother and Leigh realizes that his father is jealous.

**August 20**

Leigh realizes that he has grown a lot over the summer.

**September 12**

Leigh wears his wild shirt for the first day of school. He meets Kevin Knight, a rich kid, who tells Leigh that the wild shirt was his, but his mother gave it to the thrift shop because she hated it. Kevin chases Leigh to get the shirt but Leigh is faster.

**September 16**

To tease Kevin, Leigh wears the shirt every day and they chase each other.

**September 19**

At his mother's request, Leigh wears a different shirt to school. Geneva Weston, the auburn-haired girl whom Leigh had seen outside the Laundromat, asks him about the shirt. Leigh daydreams about her.

**September 21**

The transmission on Bill's truck has broken down, placing him in financial jeopardy.

**September 24**

Leigh and his mother quarrel about his chores, especially the task of taking the wash to the Laundromat, which Leigh hates.

**September 26**

Bill loses his tractor-trailer when he can't pay for the repairs. He moves closer to Leigh and his mother and takes a job pumping gas.

**September 30**

When Leigh writes a passage of conversation in vernacular, his English teacher makes him revise it. This makes Leigh feel even more ornery than usual.

**October 4**

Leigh gets tense when he meets his landlady while he is holding Strider.

**November 25**

Leigh and his mother have a wonderful time at the Brinkerhoffs' Thanksgiving feast.

**December 17**

Leigh is worried about many things.

**December 25**

Christmas is lonely.

**January 6**

Leigh has a fever. He is shocked when his father comes to take care of him.

**January 7**

Barry brings Leigh's books.

**January 8**

Leigh's father urges him to get an education so he can get ahead in life.

**January 10**

Leigh watches Geneva in PE class.

**January 12**

Leigh and Barry quarrel when Leigh doesn't return Strider to Barry.

**January 14**

Leigh and his mother talk about his feelings.

**January 16**

Leigh returns Strider to Barry, but Barry doesn't call.

**January 20**

Leigh misses Strider.

**January 25**

Leigh keeps running. He and Kevin become friends.

**January 26**

Leigh goes to Kevin's house and realizes that even though Kevin is rich, he is not happy.

**February 13**

Kevin and Leigh join the track team.

**February 14**

When Strider returns to Leigh, Barry lets Leigh have full custody. The boys patch up their quarrel.

**March 1**

Mrs. Smerling lets Leigh keep Strider but wants him to build a fence.

**March 2**

Leigh thinks about the fence.

**March 12**

Leigh's father helps him build the fence. They have a real talk and Leigh meets his father's girlfriend Alice.

**March 13**

Leigh is happy about the way his life is going.

**March 14**

Leigh is embarrassed when he says something foolish to Geneva.

**March 15**

Kevin visits Leigh and their friendship deepens. Leigh feels like he belongs.

**March 17**

Leigh wins third place in the first track meet.

**March 31**

Leigh invites Geneva to attend the Lovers Point Weed Pull and she agrees.

**April 1**

Leigh has a great day at the Weed Pull with Geneva.

**April 14**

Leigh qualifies for a special track meet.

**April 29**

Leigh writes a composition.

**May 2**

Mr. Drexler is surprised that Leigh didn't write about his victory in the invitational race. Mr. Drexler is very proud of Leigh. Leigh describes the race and his joy at how well his life is going.

**Background Information**

Leigh and Barry rescued Strider by adopting him. Imagine what might have been Strider's fate had the dog gone to a shelter? According to data reported voluntarily by approximately 1,000 shelters in the United States, the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy found that in 1997, roughly 64 percent of the animals that entered shelters were euthanized. The number of animals euthanized by just the shelters responding to the voluntary survey was approximately 2.7 million; the number of animals estimated by the American Humane Association to be euthanized annually in the United States tops 9.6 million. Sobering data suggest that spaying and neutering may be the only humane way of addressing the problems of pet overpopulation. According to the data from the 1997 study, which can be found at [www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nr\\_fact\\_sheets\\_animal\\_euthanasia](http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nr_fact_sheets_animal_euthanasia), 56 percent of dogs and 71 percent of cats that enter shelters are euthanized. Cats tend to be euthanized more frequently because they are more likely to enter a shelter without any owner identification. Shelters are forced to develop a timetable for animal adoption, without which they would quickly become overcrowded. Others may be deemed too sick or aggressive to warrant further treatment or care. To prevent your own pets from getting lost and potentially ending up in a shelter, follow these tips by American Humane.

- Be sure your pet wears an identification tag and rabies license and include on these your name, address, phone number and pet's name.
- Don't assume that your indoor pet doesn't need tags. Many strays in shelters are indoor cats that escaped.
- Purchase special cat collars with elastic bands to protect your cat from being caught in trees or on fences.
- In addition to ID tags, consider getting your pet tattooed or microchipped.

## Author Sketch

Beverly Cleary was born in McMinnville, Oregon, in 1916. As a young child, Cleary lived on a farm in Yamhill, a town so small that it lacked a library. Her mother arranged with the state library to have books sent to Yamhill and acted as librarian. Soon after, the family moved to Portland, where Mrs. Cleary attended grammar school and high school. She was so devoted to reading that the school librarian suggested that she should write children's books as a career. The librarian's notion took root, but with a twist: Cleary first became a librarian herself! After completing junior college in Ontario, California, and the University of California at Berkeley (1938), Cleary earned a degree from the School of Librarianship at the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1939. She worked as a children's librarian in Yakima, Washington, until she married Clarence Cleary in 1940 and moved to California. The couple had twins.



The children in Cleary's books face common situations, as we see in *Strider*. These include divorce, dislocation, and getting a pet to assuage loneliness. While her autobiographies reveal that many of her books had their basis in her own life, Cleary has also written on topics with which she has not had first-hand experience. For example, *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, the prequel to *Strider*, marked Cleary's response to many letters asking for a book about a child of divorce. She remarked in a speech reprinted in *Horn Book*: "When I wrote *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, I did not expect every reader to like Leigh as much as Ramona. Although I am deeply touched that my books have reached two generations of children, popularity has never been my goal. If it had been, I would have written *Ramona Solves the Mystery of the Haunted House and Finds a Baby Brother* or something like *Henry and Beezus Play Doctor*, instead of a book about the feelings of a lonely child of divorce."

## Critic's Corner

Beverly Cleary is one the most honored contemporary children's book writers. Among her most impressive awards is a 1975 prize from the American Library Association for substantial and lasting contributions to children's literature. Cleary also won a Laura Ingalls Wilder Award and a de Grummond Award, University of Mississippi, for distinguished contributions to children's literature. Equally important are the more than 35

statewide awards Mrs. Cleary's books have received based on the direct votes of her young readers. In 2000, to honor her invaluable contributions to children's literature, Beverly Cleary was named a "Living Legend" by the Library of Congress. Cleary's books have been translated into fourteen languages so they are available around the world. HarperCollins Children's Books recently announced that the film option for Cleary's classic book character, Ramona Quimby, had been sold to Fox 2000 and Denise DiNovi Productions. Further, Portland, Oregon, recently unveiled the Beverly Cleary Sculpture Garden for Children featuring bronze statues of Ramona Quimby, Henry Huggins, and Ribsby, in the park where Beverly used to play.

Not surprisingly, *Strider* received good reviews. For instance, Kirkus Reviews noted: "A sequel that could stand on its own (but won't have to); a comforting picture of a dear old friend thriving while continuing to work out his problems." Publishers Weekly said: "Once again, Cleary demonstrates her ability to write from the heart."

## Other Books by Beverly Cleary

*Henry Huggins* (1950)  
*Ellen Tebbits* (1951)  
*Henry and Beezus* (1952)  
*Otis Spofford* (1953)  
*Henry and Ribsby* (1954)  
*Beezus and Ramona* (1955)  
*Fifteen* (1956)  
*Henry and the Paper Route* (1957)  
*The Luckiest Girl* (1958)  
*Jean and Johnny* (1959)  
*The Real Hole* (1960)  
*Hullabaloo ABC* (1960)  
*Two Dog Biscuits* (1961)  
*Emily's Runaway Imagination* (1961)  
*Henry and the Clubhouse* (1962)  
*Sister of the Bride* (1963)  
*Ribsby* (1964)  
*The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (1965)  
*Mitch and Amy* (1967)  
*Ramona the Pest* (1968)  
*Runaway Ralph* (1970)  
*Socks* (1973)  
*Ramona the Brave* (1975)  
*Ramona and Her Father* (1977)  
*Ramona and Her Mother* (1979)  
*Ramona Quimby Age Eight* (1981)  
*Ralph S. Mouse* (1982)

*Cutting Up with Ramona!* (1983)  
*Dear Mr. Henshaw* (1983)  
*Ramona Forever* (1984)  
*The Ramona Quimby Diary* (1984)  
*Lucky Chuck* (1984)  
*Beezus and Ramona Diary* (1986)  
*The Growing-Up Feet* (1987)  
*Janet's Thingamajigs* (1987)  
*A Girl from Yamhill: A Memoir* (1988)  
*Muggie Maggie* (1990)  
*Petey's Bedtime Story* (1993)  
*My Own Two Feet: A Memoir* (1995)  
*Ramona's World* (1999)

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*The Children's Bookshelf*, Child Study Association of America, 1965.  
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*Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 52: American Writers for Children since 1960: Fiction*, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1986.  
 Gannon, Susan R., and Ruth Anne Thompson, editors, *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Children's Literature Association*, University of Missouri-Kansas City, May 16-18, 1986, Purdue University Press (West Lafayette, IN), 1988.  
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*Booklist*, September 1, 1953; September 1, 1954; October 1, 1977; May 1, 1979; September 1, 1981; September 1, 1983; September 1, 1984; April 15, 1998, p. 1460; November 15, 1998, p. 598; June 1, 1999.  
*Book Window*, spring, 1981.

*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, September, 1959; September, 1961; October, 1963; May, 1967; July, 1975; December, 1977; June, 1979; September, 1982; May, 1984; September, 1984.  
*Children's Book Review*, spring, 1975.  
*Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, fall, 1998, p. 131.  
*Elementary English*, November, 1967.  
*Entertainment Weekly*, May 7, 1993, p. 66; August 20, 1993, p. 73.  
*Horn Book*, December, 1951; December, 1959; October, 1962; October, 1963; December, 1964; June, 1969; August, 1970; August, 1975; December, 1977; October, 1982; December, 1982; October, 1983; August, 1984; September, 1984; May-June, 1988, pp. 369-370; November-December, 1990, p. 738; September-October, 1991, p. 595; May-June, 1995, p. 297; December, 1995, p. 775.  
*Library Journal*, September 15, 1950; October 15, 1952; September 15, 1957; September 15, 1962.  
*Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, June, 1988, p. 111; December, 1990, p. 58.  
*New York Times*, December 1, 1999, pp. B2, E2.  
*New York Times Book Review*, September 14, 1952; October 4, 1953; September 26, 1954; September 16, 1956; October 9, 1960; December 26, 1965; October 14, 1979; November 1, 1981; October 23, 1983; November 11, 1984; November 10, 1985; September 9, 1990, p. 17; November 10, 1991, p. 33; November 12, 1995, p. 40; November 21, 1999, p. 28.  
*Publishers Weekly*, August 4, 1951; August 15, 1953; July 10, 1954; August 13, 1955; September, 1961; April 3, 1967; April 15, 1968; May 14, 1970; March 31, 1975; February 23, 1976; October 1, 1977; July 30, 1979; July 10, 1981; March 2, 1984; July 12, 1993, p. 80; July 17, 1995, p. 138; June 7, 1999, p. 83; November 22, 1999; January 10, 2000, p. 24.  
*Washington Post*, May 31, 1983; January 10, 1984.  
*Washington Post Book World*, October 9, 1977; July 12, 1981; September 12, 1982; August 14, 1983; September 9, 1984; May 8, 1988; December 10, 1995, p. 20.

## General Objectives

1. To analyze the novel's themes
2. To evaluate the effect of divorce on children and families
3. To assess each character's personality
4. To trace the sequence of events in the novel
5. To identify with Leigh
6. To trace how Leigh matures
7. To analyze the influence that teachers have on their students
8. To consider what running represents to Leigh
9. To determine the role that Strider plays in Leigh's life
10. To understand how Leigh adjusts to his new life

## Specific Objectives

1. To understand why Leigh's father urges him to get an education and a good career
2. To compare and contrast different families and their parenting styles
3. To analyze the effect of divorce on Leigh, Kevin, and Barry, and their families
4. To see how Leigh makes new friends and becomes attracted to girls
5. To understand why Leigh worries about money and his father's job
6. To see how Leigh's father feels about his job and truck
7. To understand how his parents' divorce has affected Leigh
8. To assess Leigh's relationship with his father
9. To appreciate Leigh's relationship with his mother
10. To understand the importance of Strider's unconditional love

## Literary Terms and Applications

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

**Humor:** parts of a story that are funny. Humor can be created through sarcasm, word play, irony, and exaggeration. The famous children's writer Katherine Paterson analyzed Cleary's brand of humor in a *Washington Post Book World* article. "When I was young there were two kinds of funny—funny ha-ha and funny peculiar," Paterson wrote. "A lot of funny ha-ha things happen in Cleary's

books, but her real specialty is another kind of funny, which is a cross between funny ha-ha and funny ahhh. Cleary has the rare gift of being able to reveal us to ourselves while still keeping an arm around our shoulder. We laugh (ha ha) to recognize that funny, peculiar little self we were and are and then laugh (ahhh) with relief that we've been understood at last. . . ." We see this in the June 30th entry, when Leigh and Barry are trying to teach Strider to read. When the dog ignores the written command "ROLL OVER," the oldest Brinkerhoff girl decides that the dog has a reading problem.

**Characterization:** the different ways an author tells readers about characters. Sometimes, writers tell about characters directly. Other times, writers let readers reach their own decisions by showing the comments, thoughts, and actions of the other characters. For instance, we learn about Mr. President, the rugged old man, through his dialogue. In the following exchange, we learn that he is educated, concerned about the environment, and possessed of a wry sense of humor. In the April 1st entry, Mr. President takes the two small trees that Leigh and Geneva have been given. He says, "You're wondering what you're going to do with your graciously received but unwanted burdens. Give them to me and in the dead of night by the dark of the moon, I shall plant them in the paths tourists have trampled through native plants on their way to the beach."

**Conflict in literature:** 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. Leigh experiences an external conflict with Kevin over the shirt; he has an internal conflict when he realizes that he is being mean to Barry and abrupt with his mother.

## The Importance of Setting

Many of Cleary's books for children are set on or around Klickitat Street, a real street near her childhood home. Strider, however, is set in the real city of Pacific Grove, California.

Pacific Grove is the seaside community well-known as the place where John Steinbeck lived for several years in the 1930s. The town had its beginning in 1875 as a summer Methodist camp, where people worshipped in

tents. In November 1879, after the summer campers returned home, Robert Louis Stevenson wandered into the deserted campgrounds: "I have never been in any place so dreamlike. Indeed, it was not so much like a deserted town as like a scene upon the stage by daylight, and with no one on the boards," he wrote. Monarch butterflies were first documented in the area at this time. The town incorporated as a city in 1889. The Steinbecks moved to the town in 1930 and lived there six years, when they moved to Los Gatos.



## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Novels

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Prom*  
 Avi, *The Secret School*  
 Ann Brashares, *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*  
 Meg Cabot, *Teen Idol*  
 Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*  
 Julie Dannenberg, *First Day Jitters*  
 Kate DiCamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*  
 Lisi Harrison, *The Clique*  
 Gordon Korman, *No More Dead Dogs*  
 Patricia Reilly Giff, *Pictures of Hollis Woods*  
 Carl Hiassen, *Hoot*  
 Barbara Park, *Skinny Bones*

Louise Rennison, *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicholson*  
 Stephanie Tolan, *Surviving the Applewhites*  
 Jerry Spinelli, *Loser*  
 Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

### Media Adaptations

Pied Piper produced recordings and filmstrips of *Henry and the Clubhouse*, 1962, and *Ribsy*, 1964.  
 Miller-Brody produced recordings, some with accompanying filmstrips, of *Ramona and Her Father*, 1979; *Beezus and Ramona*, 1980; *Henry Huggins*, 1980; *Henry and Ribsy*, 1980; *Ramona and Her Mother*, 1980; *Ramona the Brave*, 1980; *Ramona Quimby, Age Eight*, 1981; *Henry and Beezus*, 1981; *Ralph S. Mouse*, 1983; and *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, 1984.

A six-episode series based on *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, *Runaway Mouse*, and *Ralph S. Mouse* was produced by Churchill Films for American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. (ABC-TV)

*Ramona*, a ten-part series based on Cleary's character Ramona Quimby, was broadcast on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in 1988; Television programs based on the "Henry Huggins" books have appeared in Japan, Sweden, and Denmark.

Many of Cleary's stories have been adapted for the stage.

### Internet

Beverly Cleary Official Website  
[www.beverlycleary.com/](http://www.beverlycleary.com/)

Beverly Cleary: Teacher Resources  
[falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/cleary.htm](http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/cleary.htm)

Author Profile: Beverly Cleary  
[www.trelease-on-reading.com/cleary.html](http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/cleary.html)

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Meet Beverly Cleary  
[www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/cleary.html](http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/cleary.html)

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## Themes and Motifs

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

### Themes

- divorce
- families
- dogs
- friends
- humor
- track
- school
- role models
- chores
- writing

### Motifs

- dealing with a family's money worries
- coping with the aftermath of a family's divorce
- adopting and caring for a pet
- sharing custody of a dog
- making new friends
- quarreling with an old friend but then making up
- taking up a new sport and excelling at it
- doing the laundry and cleaning your room
- looking to a friend's father as a role model for fatherhood
- enjoying a writer's sense of humor

## Meaning Study

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

1. "Good boy, Strider' I said, no longer playing a part in a movie. I guess I called him Strider because there is a track club called the Bayside Striders, and Strider seemed like a good name for a running dog." (p. 12)

*(In this scene, Leigh and Barry come upon the abandoned dog on the beach and name him. In so doing, they make him unique and their own.)*

2. "What are we going to do with him?' Barry asked on the way back to my place. 'Keep him,' I said" ... (p. 15)  
*(When it becomes clear that Strider has been abandoned, Leigh and Barry decide to take him home. Leigh knows that this is the right thing to do because the dog needs care, but he also worries because he knows that no animals are allowed in his apartment. This incident introduces the novel's primary motif.)*
3. "My strand stuck! I know it is silly, but having my spaghetti stick to the wall made me feel good, as if I had accomplished something really important." (p. 31)  
*(To test their spaghetti for doneness, the Brinkerhoffs toss a strand on the wall. If the spaghetti sticks, it is ready to eat. The family then lets all the built-up spaghetti dry, spray-paints it, and starts again. This incident shows how the family has fun together doing simple and silly things. They are the model blended family, filled with love and support.)*
4. "Sometimes I think Strider, not Barry, is my best friend." (p. 35)  
*(The cliché about a dog being man's best friend aside, Strider offers Leigh the love that no one else can. The dog's simple affection and support help him over the difficulty of his father's emotional distance and his family's money worries.)*
5. "Then he said, 'But you're going to have to put on muscle if you expect to play football.'" (p. 41)  
*(Leigh's father Bill assumes that Leigh is going to play football, likely because Bill himself was a high school football star. Leigh has no interest in playing football. This shows the gulf between Leigh and his father. Bill doesn't understand his son or his son's interests and values.)*
6. "Mom looked that way because I would never have worn such a shirt when I was a new kid in school moping around, being miserable about the divorce, and trying to look inconspicuous." (p. 47)  
*(Leigh buys a very garish shirt at a thrift shop and wears it to school. This shows the change in his outlook and personality in the two years since the divorce. Now, he is far more self-confident and cheerful.)*
7. "As I watched him drive off, I felt sad. If he asked questions about Mom, he must be lonely, deep down. I wish I had been nicer." (p. 56)  
*(As he matures, Leigh starts to look at events from other people's*



*vantage points. Here, he realizes that his father is not happy: the divorce has not been good for him. But Leigh's father is very immature, spending his money on video games and not sending his support checks on time, for instance. Nonetheless, Leigh feels great compassion for him.)*

8. "Dad without his rig! The first time I saw him drive it, I thought he was the biggest, strongest man in the world, and nothing could ever happen to him." (p. 73)  
*(Leigh's father is a long-distance trucker, but he loses his truck because he falls behind on the payments. The loss of his livelihood and his symbol of it—his huge truck—diminishes the man greatly. Leigh sees this and realizes that his father is mortal, as all others. Because he is maturing, Leigh realizes his father's pain and sets aside his own need for support payments.)*
9. "Dad sighed. 'I know I've let you down, but I've missed you kid, and I've grown up a lot in the last couple of years.'" (p. 122)  
*(On one level, Strider is a story about Leigh's maturity from the sullen youth of Dear Mr. Henshaw to the confident young man we see here. On another level, however, Strider is also the story of Bill's maturity as he comes to appreciate his son and realize what he has lost by being self-absorbed and immature—his marriage, his livelihood, and his son. Fortunately, he still has time to create a relationship with his son.)*
10. "After Mr. Drexler's remarks about 'we' being proud of me, I know I'll just work to beat my own time until I get wherever it is I decide to go." (p. 152)  
*(Mr. Drexler, Leigh's second-semester English teacher, had expressed his admiration for Leigh and his accomplishments. From Mr. Drexler's comment, readers can infer that many of Leigh's teachers have been impressed by Leigh's turn-around from a sulky twelve-year-old to a self-confident fourteen-year-old. Their admiration and concern further bolsters Leigh's confidence.)*

## 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. What event prompts Leigh to start writing in his diary again?  
*(He finds his old diary and it inspires him to write again.)*
2. How do Leigh and Barry acquire Strider?  
*(The boys find the dog abandoned on a local beach and take him to Leigh's house. They call the animal shelter but no one has reported a dog of Strider's description missing, so they decide to keep him, sharing custody.)*
3. Why do Leigh and Kevin fight when they first meet?  
*(Leigh is wearing Kevin's garish shirt, which Kevin's mother had donated to the thrift shop without ever letting Kevin wear it. She decided that it was ugly and donated it over Kevin's objections. Now Kevin wants his shirt back, but Leigh refuses to give it to him.)*
4. Why does Leigh quarrel with Barry?  
*(Leigh wants fully custody of Strider; he is jealous about having to share the dog. Also, he is ornery—as he describes himself—because of some family issues and the stress of maturing.)*
5. How does Leigh do in the invitational running meet?  
*(He wins, coming in first.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What does the wildly-colored shirt that Leigh buys represent?  
*(It symbolizes the changes in his personality. He would never have worn such a short when he was the new kid in school, right after his parents' divorce. Now, however, he has much more self-confidence.)*
7. Why does Leigh keep a diary?  
*(The diary functions as an outlet for Leigh's emotions. In his diary, Leigh records his frustration, loneliness, and anger—as well as his triumphs.)*
8. Why is Strider so important to Leigh?  
*(Strider gives Leigh unconditional love, making no demands on him—unlike his parents, teachers, and even his friends. Strider supplies Leigh with companionship, as well. Together, they get exercise, which helps Leigh excel at track.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. How do you think Bill, Leigh's father, feels about the changes in his life?  
*(On one level he is likely proud that he is finally maturing, but on another, he deeply regrets his past mistakes. First, he regrets that his actions forced his wife to divorce him. He also regrets not getting an education and having a secure job.)*
10. What parts of this book did you find humorous? Why?  
*(Students could cite the subplot about Mr. President, the rugged old man on the beach.)*

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

11. Demonstrate how to care for a pet, such as a dog or cat.
12. Working with some classmates, improvise a scene from earlier in the Botts' marriage when Bonnie and Bill were happy.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. Beverly Cleary is one of the most celebrated children's book authors of the 20th century. Design an award for *Strider*.
2. Write a song about dogs. Share it with some classmates.
3. Leigh buys a wildly-colored shirt at the thrift store. Design an outlandish outfit for yourself.
4. One critic noted: "Zelinsky's perceptive drawings are an excellent bonus." Explain in an essay what the drawings added to your understanding and appreciation of the novel.
5. Design a new cover for this book. Use color, shape, and graphics to capture the novel's main themes

**Speech/Drama**

1. Give a speech explaining the advantages and disadvantages of owning a dog.
2. Leigh and Barry have a custody fight over Strider. Role-play some ways that they could resolve their issues to everyone's satisfaction.
3. Leigh doesn't know how to talk to a girl so he embarrasses himself when he talks to Geneva. Create a brief play to show boys how to talk to girls.
4. Working with some classmates, role-play a scene in which Leigh and his father discuss their feelings for each other.
5. Tell some riddles, as the Brinkerhoff girls do.

**Language Arts**

1. Barry sends Leigh a postcard. Write a postcard to a friend of yours.

2. Read more about Leigh in *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. In an essay, explain what other information you learned about Leigh.
3. Leigh buys a copy of *The Human Comedy* by William Saroyan. Read this book. Why do you think Cleary used this book for Leigh's choice?
4. For his September 21st entry, Leigh edits his writing. Choose an essay that you have already written and edit it as Leigh does. Be sure to have a topic sentence, as Leigh's English teacher demands!
5. Keep a diary for a week. As Leigh does, describe the events in your life and your feelings about them.
6. Leigh studies "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in class. Read this poem and summarize it for a small group of classmates.

**History/Social Studies**

1. Mr. President, the old man on the beach, earned his nickname for his comments about how he would change the world if he were in charge. List three changes that you would make if you were America's president.
2. Research the history of dogs. Present your findings in a web page or booklet.
3. Leigh and Geneva attend the Lovers Point Weed Pull. Organize a community service project in your school or town.
4. The Lions Club helps sponsor the Weed Pull. Find out about junior versions of national service clubs for kids. Consider Rotary and Lions, for instance.
5. Make a travel brochure for Leigh's community of Pacific Grove, California. Your brochure should encourage people to visit this town.

**Science and Math**

1. Leigh is upset about his parents' divorce. Create a chart showing the divorce rate in America from 1990 to the present.
2. Leigh's mother has become a vocational nurse and studies to become a registered nurse. Find out the requirements to become a registered nurse.

3. The Brinkerhoff girls do an experiment with shrinking popcorn. Try this experiment yourself. What happens?
4. Leigh is very fond of his dog Strider. Create a booklet explaining the health advantages of having a pet.
5. When the transmission on his truck breaks down, Leigh's father falls behind in his loan payments. Make a chart showing the interest on a \$10,000 loan at 5 percent, 6 percent, 7 percent and 8 percent per year.
6. Leigh enjoys throwing spaghetti on the wall at the Brinkerhoffs' home. Find out why the cooked spaghetti sticks to a surface such as a wall.

### **Alternate Assessment**

1. Do a "gentle deed" for someone, as Mr. President suggests.
2. Describe Leigh's life before his parents divorced.
3. Write a composition without adjectives and adverbs, as Leigh must do for English class.
4. Write Strider's "back story." How did he come to be abandoned on the beach?

### **Teacher's Notes**

## Vocabulary

Complete the following crossword puzzle with these words from *Strider*.

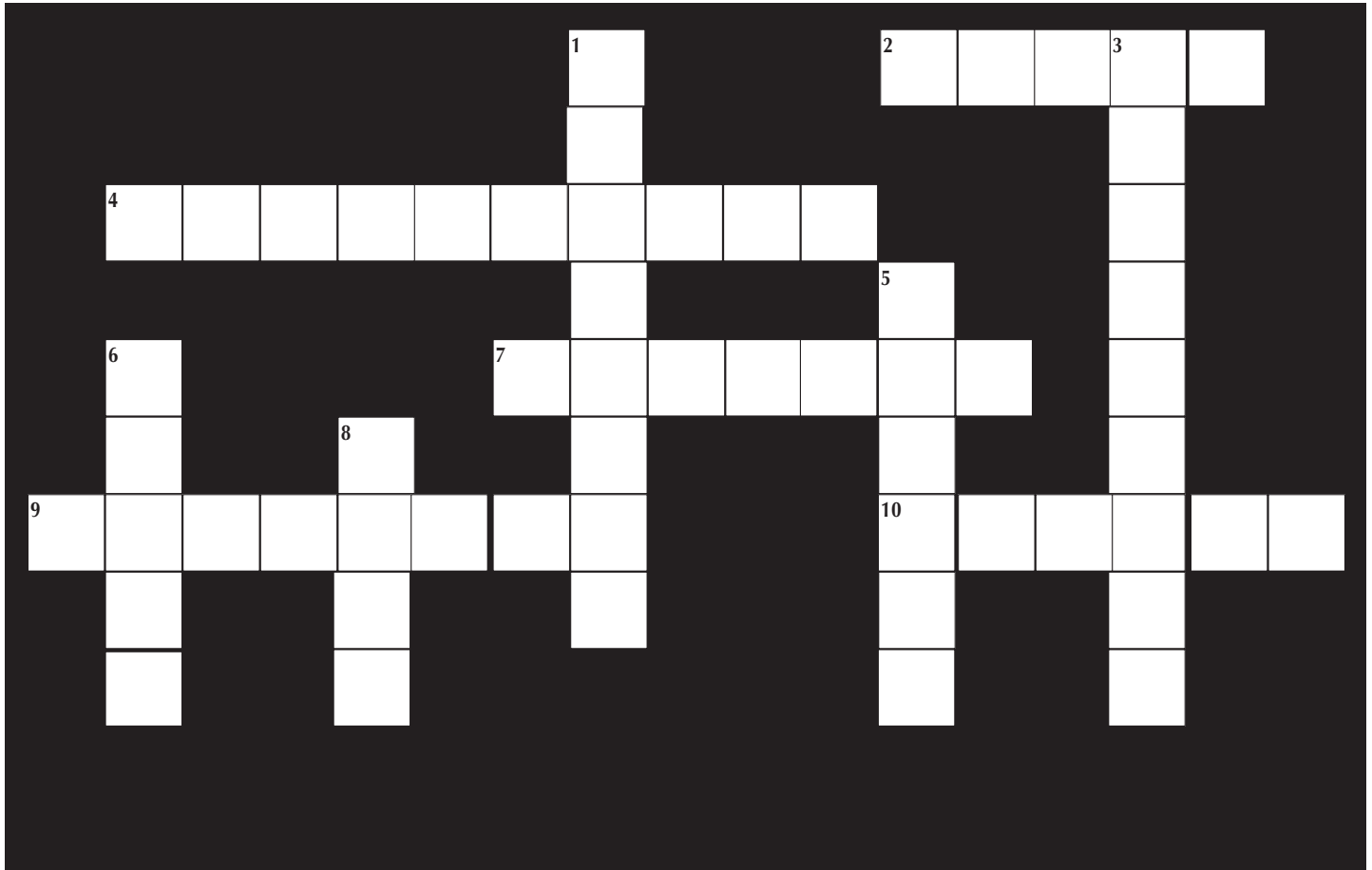
shack      discreet      gloomy      alignment      vile  
rival      compulsory      fragile      Bastille      ornery

**Across**

- 2. opponent
- 4. mandatory
- 7. easily broken
- 9. fort
- 10. stubborn

**Down**

- 1. prudent
- 3. to lineup
- 5. dark and depressing
- 6. small, crudely built dwelling; a shanty
- 8. wicked and disgusting



## 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. Leigh Botts   | F. Strider         |
| B. Kevin Knight  | G. Barry           |
| C. Bandit        | H. Ms. Habis-Jones |
| D. Mrs. Smerling | I. Katy            |
| E. Mr. Kurtz     | J. Mr. President   |

- \_\_\_ 1. Leigh's rich classmate who chases Leigh to get his shirt back
- \_\_\_ 2. The woman who owns the catering business; Leigh sweeps floor for her
- \_\_\_ 3. The rugged old man whom Leigh and Barry meet on the beach
- \_\_\_ 4. Leigh's current dog
- \_\_\_ 5. Leigh's landlady
- \_\_\_ 6. The narrator
- \_\_\_ 7. Leigh's English teacher
- \_\_\_ 8. The track coach
- \_\_\_ 9. Leigh's former dog; he now lives with Leigh's father
- \_\_\_ 10. Leigh's classmate and best friend

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

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

- 1. the fence
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. running track
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. butterflies
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4. the wildly-colored shirt
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5. Leigh's father's rig

## 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. Leigh Botts is ten years old.
- \_\_\_ 2. Leigh's mother has become a vocational nurse and studies to become a registered nurse.
- \_\_\_ 3. Leigh and Barry start to put a model car together and realize they have outgrown models.
- \_\_\_ 4. The lady at the SPCA says that someone has phoned in a description that matches Strider. However, the caller missed the deadline to pick Strider up so the boys can have him.
- \_\_\_ 5. Even though the landlady doesn't allow dogs, Leigh's mother lets him keep Strider.
- \_\_\_ 6. Leigh is upset that he hasn't grown at all over the summer; he is still very short.
- \_\_\_ 7. Leigh likes Geneva Weston, his auburn-haired classmate.
- \_\_\_ 8. Leigh's father lost his tractor-trailer when he could not pay for the repairs. He relocates closer to Leigh and his mother and takes a job pumping gas.
- \_\_\_ 9. Leigh and his mother have a wonderful time at the Brinkerhoffs' Fourth of July barbecue.
- \_\_\_ 10. Leigh goes to Kevin's house and realizes that Kevin is very happy because he is rich.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Why is Strider so important to Leigh? What need does the dog fulfill?
2. Leigh undergoes several significant changes in the course of the novel. Trace at least two of these changes. Describe Leigh before and after.
3. Is Barry a good friend to Leigh? Why or why not?
4. Compare and contrast Leigh and Kevin. Show how they are similar and different.

## Comprehension Test B

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

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

1. Leigh is (**twelve, fourteen**) years old when the novel opens.
2. His mother Bonnie has gone to school to become a (**teacher, nurse**).
3. One of Leigh's chores is doing the (**cooking, laundry**).
4. Barry and Leigh build a new (**posture dish, house**) for Strider.
5. They try to teach the dog to (**read, jump**) as well.
6. Barry spends a week in the summer in (**New York City, Los Angeles**) with his birth mother and step-father.
7. Leigh and Strider pick up (**golf balls, flowers**) until people get angry at Strider.
8. Geneva Weston is athletic and has beautiful (**red, blond**) hair.
9. The landlady lets Leigh keep Strider but wants him to (**keep the dog inside, build a fence**).
10. Leigh invites Geneva to attend the Lovers Point (**Weed Pull, Track Meet**) and she agrees.

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

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the story.

1. "Let's take him home," I said as I tried to wipe the sand from between my toes with my socks. "Maybe we could find his owner before the animal control officer gets him."
2. The part of the Brinkerhoff house I like best is the spaghetti wall.
3. Sometimes I think Strider, not Barry, is my best friend.
4. Mom looked that way because I would never have worn such a shirt when I was a new kid in school moping around, being miserable about the divorce, and trying to look inconspicuous.
5. After Mr. Drexler's remarks about "we" being proud of me, I know I'll just work to beat my own time until I get wherever it is I decide to go.

## 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. Alice             | A. the dog Leigh finds on the beach                     |
| ___ 2. Mr. Drexler       | B. the friend with whom Leigh shares dog custody        |
| ___ 3. Leigh Botts       | C. the rugged old man Leigh and Barry meet on the beach |
| ___ 4. Barry Brinkerhoff | D. Leigh's father's girlfriend                          |
| ___ 5. Strider           | E. the track coach                                      |
| ___ 6. Ms. Habis-Jones   | F. Leigh's second-semester English teacher              |
| ___ 7. Kevin Knight      | G. Leigh's rich classmate who becomes Leigh's friend    |
| ___ 8. Mrs. Smerling     | H. the novel's narrator                                 |
| ___ 9. Mr. Kurtz         | I. the landlady who gets Leigh to build a fence         |
| ___ 10. Mr. President    | J. Leigh's first-semester English teacher               |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Although *Strider* is centered around Leigh's relationship with his dog, the novel is more than just "a boy and his dog" book. Explain the novel's theme or main idea.
2. Why does Leigh's mother let him keep Strider, even though she knows that no animals are allowed in their apartment?
3. Analyze how Leigh feels about his dog. In what way does Leigh identify with his dog?
4. Explain what Barry Brinkerhoff's family and Kevin Knight's family represent in the novel. What purpose do they serve?



## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

Across	Down
2. rival	1. discreet
4. compulsory	3. alignment
7. fragile	5. gloomy
9. Bastille	6. shack
10. ornery	8. vile

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

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

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

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

- Mrs. Smerling, the landlady, blackmails Leigh into building a fence around the property; it is her unstated deal to allow Strider to stay in the apartment building. Leigh builds the fence with his father, and it serves to bring them a bit closer together.
- At the beginning of the year, Mr. Kurtz, the track coach, tries to get Leigh to join the team. Later in the year, Leigh joins and finds that he enjoys the sport and excels at it. He wins the important invitational meet.
- Butterflies represent happiness in the novel. Leigh runs around the butterfly grove, the place he visits when he is sad. "Knowing that such fragile creatures can fly as far as Alaska every year somehow cheers me up," he says. Later, he compares Geneva's hair color to the color of a butterfly.
- The wildly-colored shirt stands for not being a wimp, as Leigh says. It represents self-confidence and courage.
- Leigh's father's rig represents his livelihood, of course, but it also becomes a symbol of his self-respect and manhood. When Leigh first saw his father sitting up in the cab, he thought he had never seen anything so majestic. When Bill loses the rig for loan nonpayment, Leigh says that his father looks "dusty," beaten down by life.

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

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

### Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

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

1. fourteen	6. Los Angeles
2. nurse	7. golf balls
3. laundry	8. red
4. posture dish	9. build a fence
5. read	10. Weed Pull

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

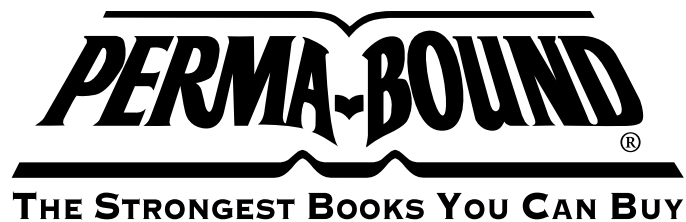
- When it becomes clear that Strider has been abandoned, Leigh and Barry decide to take him home. Leigh knows that this is the right thing to do because the dog needs care, but he also worries because he knows that no animals are allowed in his apartment.
- To test their spaghetti for doneness, the Brinkerhoffs toss a strand on the wall. If the spaghetti sticks, it is ready to eat. The family then lets all the built-up spaghetti dry, spray-paints it, and starts again. This incident shows how the family has fun together doing simple and silly things. They are the model blended family, filled with love and support for each other.
- The cliché about a dog being man's best friend aside, Strider offers Leigh the love that no one else can. The dog's simple affection and support help Leigh over the difficulty of his father's emotional distance and his family's money worries.
- Leigh buys a very garish shirt at a thrift shop and wears it to school. This shows the change in his outlook and personality in the two years since the divorce. Now, he is far more self-confident and cheerful.
- Mr. Drexler, Leigh's second-semester English teacher, had expressed his admiration for Leigh and his accomplishments. From his comment, readers can infer that many of Leigh's teachers have been impressed by his turn-around from a sulky twelve-year-old to a self-confident fourteen-year-old. The teachers' admiration and concern further bolsters Leigh's confidence.

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

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

### Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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