



# Swallowing Stones

by Joyce McDonald

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass



LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A Perma-Bound Production

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## Synopsis

### Prologue

On July 4th in Briarwood, Jenna Ward watches as her father reshingles the roof. A bullet strikes him; he falls to the ground. The death is the result of one shot from 17-year-old Michael MacKenzie's Winchester rifle. He fired into the air to impress Joe Sadowski.

### 1. Michael

On the day he applies for a driver's license after a year with a learner's permit, Michael MacKenzie awakens at 4:00 A.M. He recalls groping Amy Ruggerio in the garage while Darcy helped his mother in the kitchen. At 6:30 A.M., he hurries to the home of Joe Sadowski, his only friend who owns a car. On the way to the DMV, Michael hears a radio report about the shooting. Joe suggests that Michael hide the rifle and learn to live with guilt. They agree to keep silent. Michael leaves his road test without finishing. That night, he conceals his antique rifle in a PVC pipe under a stack of firewood.

### 2. Jenna

After Charlie Ward's death, his daughter Jenna and Jenna's mother Meredith need sedatives to sleep. Police Chief Dave Zelenski stations officers at the scene. The next morning, Meredith assigns Jenna the vacuuming before visitors arrive. Zelenski questions mother and daughter.

### 3. Michael

On Thursday, July 6, the morning paper pictures Jenna. Michael recalls when his grandfather gave him the antique rifle when Michael was young. The previous day, Michael rode the city bus to a distant town and concealed from his father the failed driving test. At 9:00 A.M., Michael went to work as a guard at the Briarwood Community Pool. Darcy Kelly, whom he has dated for six months, complains that he didn't take her for a ride.

He recalls several years ago when a girl drowns because she didn't swallow a stone that became lodged in her throat.

### 4. Michael

At the public library at 5:30 P.M., Michael reads newspaper articles about the shooting death. Before supper, Darcy tells him to come for her around 8:30 P.M. At a party at Steven Chang's house, Amy Ruggerio flirts. Joe gets drunk on beer and subtly threatens Michael. Two police officers arrive to investigate noise complaints.

Darcy and Michael steer Joe across the yard.

### 5. Michael

By the next morning, Michael discovers that Joe was gone from the garage, where he had slept after the party. Darcy suggested that Michael get a new friend. To avoid his parents' discussion of Mr. Ward's death, Michael goes to the pool, where he paints over graffiti. After work, he walks to the Ward house, then wanders town. At the Ruggerio house, while Pappy sleeps, his granddaughter Amy initiates a game of Scrabble. She and Michael fall asleep. The next morning, he returns to his roaming and brooding.

### 6. Jenna

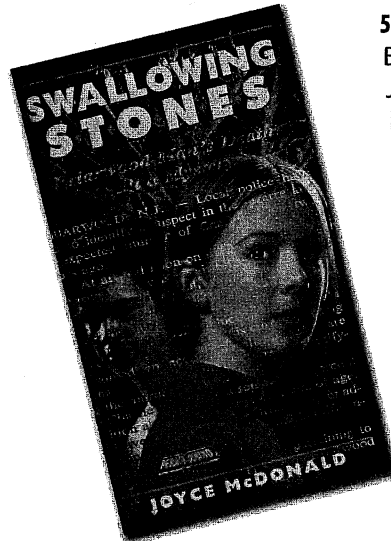
Dreams plague Jenna. Each day, she keeps her room scrupulously clean and solves math problems to add order to her life. Some weeks after the funeral, Andrea Sloan invites Jenna to the pool the next day. Meredith Ward is unable to comfort Jenna. Jenna ponders the boy sitting on the church steps across the street on July 6 and for ten subsequent evenings.

### 7. Jenna

In late July, Jenna goes to the pool and looks for Jason Friedman. That afternoon, Jason asks to take Jenna to a movie at the mall. During their conversation, Jenna sees Michael at the church. At 5:30 P.M., Meredith reports that Chief Zelenski had called her at work.

### 8. Jenna

The police trace the bullet to a four-block radius and go door-to-door investigating. On July 28, Jenna hurries to



the police station to ask about progress on the case. From Annie Rico, Jenna learns that the suspect area is a section between Elm and Maple streets west of Main Street. At the movie, Jenna experiences a panic attack in the restroom, where Amy Ruggerio assists her. Jason apologizes for selecting a violent movie.

**9. Michael**

Sleepless the day he sees Jenna at the pool, Michael also lapses into difficult dreams. At 3:00 A. M., he finds Josh watching television. Josh reports that the police are nearing an arrest of the killer. Michael bristles at the implication that he killed Mr. Ward. On lonely nights while Darcy is at Ocean City, Michael returns to Amy's house.

**10. Michael**

Michael passes his driving test. He is too stressed to attend Kim Cohen's party with Darcy. She accuses him of seeing Amy and admits following him. He defends Amy from character assassination. She bites him. He returns to the library to read about the shooting.

**11. Michael**

In early August, officers Doug "Hangman" Boyle and Ralph Healey question Tom MacKenzie, who reports the family's three rifles. Michael claims that his rifle is at Joe's house. In mock consternation, Michael talks with Joe on the phone about a theft from Joe's car. They meet at the park to confirm their story and depart when Doug appears.

**12. Michael**

The next evening, after Joe conceals his CD player and hides it in the attic, the police arrive at the Sadowski house. Joe enjoys lying to the authorities. Five days after breaking up with Darcy, Michael finds Amy weeping. She refuses to talk to him. A few days later, Michael learns that Darcy has come to Amy's house and reported a lie about the track team using her for group sex.

**13. Jenna**

In mid-August, Jenna and Andrea take a bus to Spring Lake. Jenna confesses that she wants to shoot the killer in the courtroom. Three weeks after meeting Amy at the theater, Jenna receives a letter from Amy comparing Jenna's loss with the deaths of Amy's parents in a car wreck. Jenna weeps for her father.

**14. Jenna**

Jenna dreams that Amy leads her from a tangle of vines. Meredith reports that someone cleaned the gutters and weeded the flower beds. In the third week of August,

Jenna is certain that Michael watches the house. Andrea discovers that Jenna knows Amy.

**15. Jenna**

At Judd Passarello's party, Andrea wants to see Michael. Jenna carries the message to Michael, who drives away. Andrea rages at being embarrassed. That night, Jenna has a troubling dream about Michael.

**16. Michael**

Shortly before Labor Day, Michael runs to ready himself for track. He thinks about his night-time assistance to the Wards and about Doug Boyle's surveillance. Michael encounters Amy and refutes Darcy's lie. They agree to talk later. At home, he finds the police scanning his yard with metal detectors.

**17. Michael**

Karen is annoyed that the police search the property. Doug locates an empty casing of a cavalry cartridge. Tom tries to explain the actions of the crowd at the birthday party. Josh suggests that Joe fired the gun. Michael feels obligated to warn Joe that he may be arrested.

**18. Michael**

The next day after work, Joe meets Michael at the pool parking lot. Joe's drinking worsens under stress. Michael reports Healey's suspicions and promises to confess rather than have Joe arrested. At the Great Swamp, Joe accuses Michael of screwing up the perfect life. Shortly after 6:00 P. M., Michael drives Joe's Mustang into the back of Amy's Tercel. Joe leaps on the Tercel, crushes the windshield, and accuses her of stupidity.

**19. Jenna**

Early in September, Meredith soothes Jenna, who screams during a nightmare. She recalls her father's story of the legendary Ghost Tree in the Great Swamp, where dead ancestors communicate with the living. Meredith remains home from work amid piles of her husband's clothes.

**20. Jenna**

Later, as mother and daughter load clothes to give away, Annie Rico reports the arrest of Joe Sadowski. Jenna goes to the Sadowski home and sees Michael meeting Joe. Jenna realizes that Amy may know something about the boys' part in the shooting.

**21. Michael**

Before Labor Day, the police question the 40 guests at Michael's birthday party. Michael ponders getting a ticket for careless driving. At the emergency room,

Pappy reported that Amy was okay. Josh is exultant that he picked Joe as the shooter. Michael realizes that his parents blame themselves. In the Sadowski tree-house, Joe tells Michael that there is only circumstantial evidence. The police arrive with a search warrant. Michael promises to confess if Joe is arrested.

**22. Michael**

Michael wonders if Joe shot the rifle during Michael's absence with Amy in the garage. When Michael visits her, she claims that Joe brought her to the party as a present. Michael feels betrayed and considers letting Joe take the blame for the shooting. Amy reminds Michael that she saw him with the rifle at the time of the shooting. He weeps as she hugs him.

**23. Jenna**

On Labor Day weekend, Jenna sees Amy at the pool and thanks her for the letter. Amy admits to feeling guilt for surviving the accident that killed her parents. While Michael stares from the lifeguard stand, Amy discusses the police suspicions about Joe's guilt. That night, Jason invites Jenna to go for a walk. She has a flashback of talking to Jason just before her father's death.

**24. Jenna**

Jenna tells her mother about the panic attacks. Both feel remorse for Charlie's death. Jenna confides that a friend knows that Joe is innocent. She suspects that Michael is the shooter.

**25. The Healing**

The day before Labor Day, Jenna bikes to the Great Swamp. Michael digs up the rifle. Jenna climbs the Ghost Tree. Michael parks at the church before dawn, then goes to the Ghost Tree to confess his guilt to Jenna.

**Character Genealogy**

**MacKenzies**

Grandfather MacKenzie  
 |  
 Tom MacKenzie=Karen MacKenzie  
 | clerk at Briarwood Florist

Michael age 17 lifeguard  
 |  
 Josh age 13

**Wards**

Charlie Ward=Meredith Ward  
 manager at AT&T | account executive  
 |  
 Jenna Ward age 15

**Ruggerios**

Pappy=grandmother  
 | died  
 father=mother  
 killed in a car wreck ten  
 years earlier  
 |  
 Amy Ruggerio

**Author Sketch**



From childhood in Chatham, New Jersey, Joyce Arlene Schanbacher McDonald, a native of San Francisco, lived around books. Her father, Eugene William Schanbacher, was a Marine veteran of the Pacific theater in World War II and a police lieutenant. Her mother, Mayme Elizabeth Schanbacher, regularly read bedtime stories to her and her three younger brothers, Bob, Jack, and Rick. Drawn to movies, McDonald was also a devoted reader of classic literature and comic books, a teller and illustrator of tales, and a student of other writers. She began composing at age six. In her teens and early twenties, she wrote verse, a genre that permeates her young adult fiction. She learned the writing trade while working for Scribners and for textbook publisher Springer-Verlag. After abandoning a major in art, she completed English degrees from the University of Iowa and a Ph.D. from Drew University. She taught literature and composition at Drew and East Stroudsburg Universities.

McDonald was drawn to the books of Betsy Byers, Lois Lowry, and Barbara Park, all authors of teen favorites. While managing a book store, McDonald wrote stories for children's magazines and began publishing middle-school fiction and a literary magazine on her own press. Her impetus was the fun of fantasizing about seeing life through the eyes of other people. She still lives and writes in Blairstown, New Jersey, with her husband, computer technologist and teacher Hubert "Mac" McDonald, and their four cats. In 2006, she co-chaired a conference of the Rutgers University Council on Children's Literature. That same year, she served a writer-in-residency at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky.

**Critic's Corner**

For the theme of human duality in her thriller *Swallowing Stones*, Joyce McDonald earned a book selection for One Book New Jersey, a community read sponsored by the New Jersey Library Association's Public Relations Committee and Children's Services and Young Adult Sections. The novel also received a Young Adult Library Services Association Best of the Best 100, VOYA Outstanding Title of the Year, and an American Library Association Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults. Her other honors include an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults and an Edgar Allan Poe Award for *Shades of Simon Gray* and a New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age for *Shadow People*.

**Bibliography**

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- Blumenthal, Bob. *A Parent-Teacher Guide to Children's Books on Peace and Tolerance*. Victoria, B. C.: Trafford, 2005.
- Bradburn, Frances. "Books for Older Readers," *Booklist* 94, no. 4 (15 October 1997): 397-398.
- Devereaux, Elizabeth, and Diane Roback. "Forecasts," *Publishers Weekly* 22 (September 1997): 82.
- Dillon, Brooke Selby. "Fiction," *Book Report* 16, no. 3 (November/December 1997): 37-38.
- Griffith, Pat. "Review: *Swallowing Stones*," *School Library Journal* 44, no. 11 (November 1998): 71.
- Harris, Karen. "Audiobooks," *Booklist* 95, no. 12 (15 February 1999): 1084.
- "Review: *Swallowing Stones*," *Publishers Weekly* 252, no. 44 (7 November 2005): 49-50.
- Schall, Lucy. *Booktalks and More: Motivating Teens to Read*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2003.
- Shoemaker, Joel. "Fiction," *School Library Journal* 43, no. 9 (September 1997): 219.
- "Unspoken Words—Words Left Unspoken," *Emergency Librarian* 25, no. 5 (May/June 1998): 46.

**Other Works by the Author**

- Mail-Order Kid*, 1988
- Homebody*, 1991
- Comfort Creek*, 1996
- Swallowing Stones*, 1997
- The Stuff of Our Forebears: Willa Cather's Southern Heritage*, 1998
- Shadow People*, 2000
- Shades of Simon Gray*, 2001
- Devil on My Heels*, 2004
- "Transfusion" in *Don't Cramp My Style*, 2004
- Drowning Lessons*, 2006

**Timeline of Fictional Events**

- a decade earlier** Amy survives a car accident that kills her parents.
- several years earlier** A girl drowns because she doesn't swallow a stone lodged in her throat.
- previous year** Michael MacKenzie gets a learner's permit.
- February** He begins dating Darcy Kelly.
- Tuesday, July 4th** Jenna Ward sees her father die from a gunshot wound.
- that night** Police Chief Dave Zelenski stations officers at the scene.

**Wednesday, July 5**

- 4 A.M.** Michael hurries to Joe Sadowski's house.
- later** After hearing radio news about Charlie Ward's death, Michael leaves his road test without finishing.
- 9:00 A.M.** He works as a guard at the Briarwood Community Pool.
- that night** He conceals his rifle in a PVC pipe under a stack of firewood.

**Thursday, July 6**

- 6:30 P.M.** Michael reads newspaper articles about the shooting.
- 8:30 P.M.** At a party at Steven Chang's house, Joe gets drunk on beer and subtly threatens Michael.
- later** Michael begins a vigil at Jenna's house.
- next evening** Michael walks to the Ward house, then to the Ruggerio house, where he and Amy fall asleep.
- late July** Jenna sees Michael at the church.
- July 28** She learns that the suspect area is a section between Elm and Maple streets west of Main Street.

- that evening** At a movie, she receives Amy's aid during a panic attack.
- early August** Police question Tom MacKenzie.
- later** Michael and Joe meet at the park to confirm their story.
- next evening** Joe conceals his CD player and lies about a theft from his car.
- mid-August** Jenna receives a letter from Amy comparing Jenna's loss with the deaths of Amy's parents.
- a week later** Jenna is certain that Michael watches the house.
- before Labor Day** Doug Boyle locates an empty shell casing.

- next day after** Michael drives Joe's Mustang into the back of Amy's Tercel.

- early September** Police pick up Joe Sadowski.
- before Labor Day** Michael promises to confess if Joe is arrested.

- later** Amy reminds Michael that she saw him with the rifle the day of the party.
- Labor Day weekend** Jenna thanks Amy for the letter.
- that night** Jenna and Meredith feel guilt for Charlie's death.

- day before** Michael digs up the rifle and plans to confess his guilt to Jenna, who sleeps in the Ghost Tree.

## General Objectives

1. To comprehend the impact of sudden death
2. To isolate incidents of victimization and deceit
3. To account for destructive gossip
4. To analyze moral and immoral points of view
5. To connect the themes of isolation and self-doubt
6. To list causes of regret
7. To summarize events that lead to social isolation
8. To discuss the need for sympathy and friendship
9. To enumerate incidents that reflect character development
10. To list examples of cruelty, callousness, intimidation, and lying

## Specific Objectives

1. To summarize the roles of Josh, Pappy, Andrea, Jason, Darcy, and Doug Boyle
2. To compare the crimes of Joe and Michael
3. To cite examples of illogical thinking concerning the shooting
4. To analyze details, particularly the damaged Tercel, Scrabble, parallel parking, a casing, an extension ladder, sunglasses, PVC pipe, bikini strap, Lenape, and a leaky roof
5. To account for Michael's long friendship with Joe
6. To explain why Jenna chooses to thank Amy in public
7. To justify the house-to-house investigation over four blocks
8. To evaluate elements of police work
9. To contrast examples of clear thinking and logic among interviewers
10. To project how Michael's confession will impact his friends, family, and neighbors

## Related Reading

Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool"  
 Robert Cormier, *The Chocolate War* and *I Am the Cheese*  
 Lois Duncan, *Killing Mr. Griffin*  
 Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*  
 Tony Johnston, *Any Small Goodness*  
 M. E. Kerr, *Gentlehands*  
 Ring Lardner, "Haircut"  
 Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*  
 Benjamin John Mikaelson, *Touching Spirit Bear*  
 Walter Dean Myers, *Monster* and *Shooter*  
 Susan Pfeffer, *The Year Without Michael*  
 Paul Zindel, *The Pigman* and *The Pigman's Legacy*

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Joyce McDonald's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

**Episode** a coherent event, digression, or incident in a narrative or serial that stands out on its own merit, in particular, Jenna's movie date with Jason at the mall and her inability to control panic when she retreats to the restroom. The coincidental meeting between Jenna and Amy refutes rumors that Amy is an unprincipled flirt. The encounter precipitates sympathy toward Jenna from a fellow sufferer of guilt and sorrow.

**Characterization** the creation of full-fledged human motivation, behavior, and response in fictional people. McDonald presents Michael from a variety of perspectives—as a son, brother, friend, student, track star, and employee of the Briarwood Community Pool. His weaknesses and strengths suggest a stage of maturity at which coping with an accidental shooting is beyond his grasp. As he observes Pappy and Amy's kindness, Jenna's grief, Darcy's jealousy, Tom's loyalty to his son, and Joe's mendacity, Michael begins to sort out in his own mind the qualities that he wants to develop.

## The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Joyce McDonald's *Swallowing Stones* is the small community of Briarwood, in which people know each other. At the birthday party, Michael MacKenzie displays his rifle to Joe in view of Amy. Thus, the effort to conceal the shooting is doomed from the start. Because Michael walks the town and visits the library in search of more information about the investigation, his movements draw public attention, especially from Pappy and Amy. Michael's vigil at the church across the street from the Ward home also raises questions from Meredith and Jenna.

For local high school students, summer gathering places at the mall movie theater, the Briarwood Community Pool, and the park offer opportunities for youth to discuss dating, parties, and the shooting of Charlie Ward. When police begin questioning guests at Michael's birthday party, swimmers stop by the lifeguard station to comment to Michael on the ongoing investigation. For Michael and Joe, such public discussion threatens their secret. They withdraw to the parking lot, pond, and Joe's Mustang and treehouse for private conferences on how to avoid arrest.

Throughout Michael's ordeal, he is unable to escape the microcosms of family and community. Pacing the McKenzie house during a sleepless night, Michael encounters Josh watching late-night television. While visiting the Ruggerio home, he comes under Pappy's scrutiny. At parties and the pool, teen friends observe and discuss relationships, especially with Amy and Joe, the outsiders. In the plot resolution, Michael sits near the Ghost Tree, a symbol of unending ties to family members who, like ghosts, encircle and influence his actions.

### **Cross-Curricular Sources**

For more information about Joyce McDonald, teen crime, guns, gossip, jealousy, ballistics, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

#### **Audiocassettes with books**

*Monster*, Listening Library  
*MrNICE@XXX.COM*, Recorded Books  
*The Shoestring Murders*, Recorded Books  
*Shooter*, Harper Audio

#### **Books**

*Any Small Goodness*  
*The Chocolate War*  
*The Face on the Milk Carton*  
*I Am the Cheese*  
*Killing Mr. Griffin*  
*La Vida Loca*  
*Monster*  
*The Pigman*  
*The Pigman's Legacy*  
*Touching Spirit Bear*

#### **Internet**

Counseling Services for Families  
<http://www.nire.org/famcou63.htm>  
Crisis, Grief, and Healing  
<http://www.webhealing.com>  
Guns and Kids <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/sonoma/07.29.99/guns-9930.html>  
Teen Firearm Violence  
<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens/firearm.asp>

#### **Kit**

*Everyday Law for Young Citizens*, Social Studies School Service

#### **Pamphlet**

*Putting on Mock Trials*, Social Studies School Service

#### **Poem**

"We Real Cool," Gwendolyn Brooks

#### **Reference**

*The Plain Language Law Dictionary*, Social Studies School Service  
*Violence*, Greenhaven

#### **Videos/films**

*I Am the Cheese*  
*I Know What You Did Last Summer*  
*Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*  
*We Were the Mulvaney*

### **Themes and Motifs**

A study of the central issues and situations in *Swallowing Stones* should include these aspects:

#### **Themes**

- immaturity
- deceit
- alienation
- questioning
- regret
- gossip
- ostracism
- compassion
- crime
- family
- confession
- forgiveness

#### **Motifs**

- coping with an unintentional shooting
- seeking relief from mental torment
- comprehending the need for acceptance

### **Meaning Study**

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the memoir. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. I think when it's an accident it's called involuntary manslaughter or something like that. (Chapter 1, p. 12)  
(Regardless of circumstances, criminal law demands an inquiry and justice when one person kills another. In cases where the slaying was unintentional, the legal code downgrades the seriousness of the infraction from premeditated or spur-of-the-moment murder to involuntary manslaughter.)

2. But at least he took the time to talk to her when he got back, although all he did was confirm that they were in the process of questioning people from the area the ballistics team had outlined. (Chapter 8, p. 85)  
*(The police chief, Dave Zelenski, must conceal from the public any aspects of the investigation that might jeopardize an arrest in the shooting death of Charlie Ward. Zelenski makes an effort to console Jenna by telling her that he is gathering information from an area that firearms experts pinpoint as the source of the stray bullet.)*
3. He planned to enter it in the Westinghouse Science Talent Search when it was ready. (Chapter 8, p. 87)  
*(Jason wants to compete in a national contest begun in 1942 to honor creative, inventive thinking in pre-college students. Awards include money for tuition and computers.)*
4. You were hyperventilating. (Chapter 8, p. 90)  
*(Jenna's rapid or deep breathing results from anxiety, stress, and unresolved emotions following her father's sudden death. By overbreathing, she feels breathless from low levels of carbon dioxide in the blood and a smothering sensation that worsens her panic. Amy soothes the terror with reassurance, a wet cloth on the neck, and a paper towel to breathe into.)*
5. Man, you are really getting paranoid. (Chapter 12, p. 123)  
*(Paranoia is a serious mental illness marked by suspicion, preoccupation with fear and regret, defensiveness and mistrust, doubts about the loyalty and sincerity of friends, guilt, and solitude.)*
6. He killed all of us. I want him to know that. (Chapter 13, p. 136)  
*(In private to Andrea, Jenna claims that her father's sudden death was a lethal blow to the whole family. In anger at the unidentified shooter, she wants to face her father's killer and charge the shooter with a crime against all the Wards.)*
6. I'm an accessory, remember? (Chapter 18, p. 180)  
*(Joe is aware of the self-incrimination he incurs by helping Michael avoid detection as the shooter and by advising him to hide the gun from authorities.)*
7. Some people claimed the Native Americans from the area, the Lenape tribe, had started the legend over three hundred years ago. (Chapter 19, p. 189)  
*(The Lenni Lenape or Delaware nation takes its name from traditional territory along the Delaware River. They belong to the Algonquian language group, the first native Americans to come in contact with the Dutch, English, and Swedish explorers arriving in the early 1600s. The Lenape earned respect as peacemakers among Europeans and other tribes.)*

8. They'll probably present it to a grand jury. (Chapter 20, p. 201)  
*(A grand jury is a secret 25-member body that investigates allegations of crime by weighing evidence and indicting suspects for whom there is reasonable or probable cause for charge with felonies. Unlike trial juries, a grand jury does not hear testimony by witnesses or suspects.)*
9. Why did everyone have to treat Amy like a pariah, anyway? (Chapter 23, p. 224)  
*(A pariah is an outcast whom society shuns because of suspicions of malicious, violent, or indecent behavior. Contributing to Amy's low status are unfounded gossip, innuendo, and the lies that Darcy spreads out of jealousy and vengeance for losing Michael.)*
10. She is not seeing with her eyes. (Chapter 25, p. 239)  
*(In a benevolent dreamscape, Jenna communes with her dead father by merging herself with the night sky. In a vision of connectedness, she feels gathered to the stars and to her father's spirit. In the Great Swamp, she comments that "the mind has different ways of knowing." Through an intuitive connection with Charlie Ward and Michael MacKenzie, she rids her heart of anger and begins self-healing by letting go of hurt and sorrow.)*

## 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 with quotations from the novel.

### Motivation

1. What causes the teenagers in the novel to feel isolated?  
*(The burden of guilt and hurt feelings isolates and alienates the youth of Briarwood. Michael feels alone and anxious because he knows that his firing of the rifle killed Charlie Ward. Joe, who isolates himself from his peers by drinking and sleazy behavior, protects Michael and voluntarily lies to the police as a challenging game. Amy, the school pariah, seems friendless because of a decade of hidden guilt over her parents' deaths and because of her peers' lies about her sexual behavior. Darcy becomes jealous and angry after the breakup with Michael. Jenna, like Amy, suffers guilt after her father's death because she did not hang up the phone when her mother ordered her to. Jason, who was talking with Jenna at the time, shares her guilt that their lengthy conversation contributed to Charlie Ward's vulnerability on the roof.)*



## Setting

2. Describe the location of the shooting.  
*(The shooting on the Fourth of July occurs in Briarwood during at Michael MacKenzie's home during his 17th birthday party. He takes Joe Sadowski to the woods to demonstrate a family heirloom, his grandfather's gun. Amid the noise of 40 guests and community fireworks, the discharge of the antique cavalry rifle is indistinguishable. At the Ward house, while Charlie repairs a shingle on the roof, the bullet strikes him and knocks him to the ground. The two settings—separated by blocks of residences on a holiday—seem unrelated until ballistics reports indicate a trajectory and distance that the bullet traveled.)*

## Character Development

3. Why does Michael keep his vigil?  
*(The terrible ordeal and subsequent vigil serve as builders of character. Overwhelmed on July 5 by a radio report of the unintentional shooting death, Michael grows anxious. He leaves the driving test without completing it, makes a pact with Joe Sadowski to say nothing, and walks the town in search of peace. After looking up the Ward address at the public library, he feels drawn to Jenna Ward's home and to the family suffering grief from the death of a husband and father. Gradually, Michael involves himself in the family's life by secretly cleaning the gutters and weeding the flower beds. His acts of atonement fail to relieve him of guilt, which he realizes he must confess to his parents, the police, and the Wards.)*

## Urban Milieu

4. How does the novel stress urban life?  
*(At the MacKenzie home, Tom keeps his two rifles and Michael's antique cavalry rifle in a locked cabinet along with ammunition. The security is necessary in an urban setting, where firing a high-powered gun could result in tragedy in any direction. Charlie Ward, who lives several blocks away, has no reason to fear danger while he repairs a shingle on the roof. His death accentuates the senselessness of the shooting and the vulnerability of anyone within range of rifle fire. To rid himself of guilt, Michael withdraws to the Great Swamp with Joe and eventually encounters Amy sleeping in the Ghost Tree. The oasis of wildlife and woods contrasts the warren of homes in the three-block radius that the police comb while they look for clues.)*

## Theme

5. Why is vulnerability a controlling theme?  
*(The inability of people to protect themselves from harm dominates the novel. Years before the story, a girl swims toward pebbles, captures one in her mouth, and drowns because she does not swallow the pebble, which lodges in her air passage. McDonald uses the incident to generate a title that describes Michael's emotional paralysis from terror and guilt. When he stumbles on Amy's house, he discovers a girl whom peers malign and who bears her own anguish from the age of seven, when*

*she survived the car crash that killed her parents. After Michael's break-up with his girlfriend, Darcy spreads vicious lies about Amy as a means getting even with a girl she considers a rival. During this same period, Amy encounters Jenna at the movies in the throes of a panic attack. Herself vulnerable and misunderstood, Amy finds the compassion to comfort Jenna and to write a letter about the ongoing anguish of missing a dead parent.)*

## Interpretation

6. Why is the novel believable?  
*(Joyce McDonald is skilled at verisimilitude. Her description of the flirtations and dating frenzy at the pool and excitement over summer parties replicates teen social life and pastimes during summer months. The details of the Mustang's rear-end collision with the Tercel on the highway ramp and of teen reaction to the questioning of 40 birthday party guests evidence the types of human involvement that generates talk and judgments. Essential to the setting and characters are the tender feelings and confused values that cause Jason to wonder how to comfort Jenna and that encourage Andrea to be a friend to Jenna during rough times. More troubling is Michael's choice of Joe for a friend who obviously does not share Michael's morals and who leads Michael further from disclosure of a tragic incident.)*

## Conflict

7. Why does conflict grow?  
*(After Joe and Michael decide to conceal the rifle firing from parents and police, Michael bears a mounting burden of grief and self-blame. From identifying Jenna's house and watching her and her mother from across the street, he feels less able to tolerate deceit. Feeling alone and culpable, he tries to cope with an investigation that gradually zeroes into his block and his home. Contributing to teen angst is the break-up with Darcy and the maligning of Amy, a kind friend whom Michael knows is guiltless of accused sexual wrongdoing. When Joe also categorizes Amy as a slut, Michael begins to contrast the two as his friends and to realize that Amy deserves protection more than Joe.)*

## Atmosphere

8. How does the text indicate internal battles?  
*(Internal discontent and self-questioning affect characters differently. For Joe, beer is the solution to worry and to boredom at work. For Amy, retreat to Pappy's home, a condolence letter to Jenna, and a casual friendship with Michael offer some relief from a decade of guilt about the Ruggierios' deaths. Meanwhile, Jenna and Meredith try to establish a two-person routine to replace the trio of family that once inhabited their home. Meredith is sensitive to her daughter's sorrow and to the nightmares that disrupt Jenna's rest. The final star-decked scene at the Ghost Tree brings together the characters who can minister to each other—Michael by confessing his guilt and surrendering his rifle to police and Jenna by forgiving Michael.)*



**Author Purpose**

9. Why does the novel appeal to readers?  
*(The novel offers a light touch on a complex situation. By picturing Michael going about his job protecting swimmers at the Briarwood Community Pool, McDonald enhances positive elements of his nature, particularly responsibility and reliability. His love for younger brother Josh and the vigil at the Ward house attest to basic goodness in Michael that he somehow must put into action. Meanwhile, the interaction of guests at summer parties, swimmers at the pool, and telephone conversations and dates reveals the tenuous nature of teen sociability. Michael's place at the center of brutal gossip against Amy and questionable deals with Joe force Michael to come to terms with his own values and their defense. His choice to confess and to comfort Jenna declares to readers that the worst of unintentional crimes is still worthy of forgiveness.)*

**Structure**

10. Why does the author alternate point of view from Michael to Jenna?  
*(The variance of point of view instructs readers on the value of looking at tragedy from all sides. Michael, who is avoiding blame for having committed a crime, retreats into self-blame and hiding while collecting data on the shooting death of Charlie Ward. Jenna, who sees her father crumple and fall from the roof, has her own self-blame to counter. After she sees Michael at his vigil across the street, she begins building a fantasy of a lonely person who needs a friend. After the two characters recognize each other as victim and perpetrator, the final scene calls for the author to stop viewing them separately and bring them together to end the terrible summer and to help each other find solace and relief from internal torment.)*

**How Language Works**

McDonald uses conversation as a means of identifying integrity and internal stress in characters:

1. Michael reveals honesty in his evaluation of the radio report of a shooting death: "But it's still manslaughter, right? You could go to prison for something like that, right?"
2. Joe, whose character tends toward addictive behavior and lying, replies, "Look, nobody has to find out. Not if you get rid of the gun."
3. Meredith Ward, a stalwart widow and single parent, conceals her anguish under brief confessions of struggle: "It's so hard ... So much harder than I ever imagined."
4. In confusion about Michael's advances toward her in the garage during the birthday party, Amy

confronts him with a straightforward question: "So it was just about sex, right?"

5. Jason, who attempts to be both consoler and boyfriend to Jenna, shares some of her guilt for not ending their telephone conversation: "So then it's my fault, too."
6. Meredith speaks wisdom to her daughter that helps to dispel guilt: "You need to keep things in perspective. Don't punish yourself for something you had no control over."

**Across the Curriculum**

**Composition**

1. Compose a pamphlet explaining how to cope with apprehension by police as suspects and with questioning by police detectives, parents, and friends. Cite the rights of citizens as stated in the Miranda law.
2. Express in a theme the value of writing letters to friends who have suffered loss of family members. Suggest methods of lessening the hurt.
3. Present opposing views of the shooting from the point of view of a guest at the party, ballistics expert, medical examiner, news reporter, member of the Ward family, Mr. Krebs, Joe, or Police Chief Dave Zelenski.

**Religion and Ethics**

1. Outline a graveside service for Amy Ruggerio's parents or for Charlie Ward. Indicate how outsiders can ease the suffering of the families. What obligation do parents, students, party guests, and neighbors have to help Ralph Healey and Doug Boyle investigate the shooting?
2. Divide the class into small groups to outline ethical questions concerning Michael's gun ownership in boyhood, the city's lack of gun control for youth, Grandfather MacKenzie's responsibility for giving him a high-powered cavalry rifle, Tom MacKenzie's lax supervision of the gun and ammunition, Joe's role in concealing the shooting, Michael's attempt to conceal the weapon, lies to the police about burglary, Michael's consideration of letting Joe bear the blame, and Jenna's failure to report the daily vigils by the boy sitting on the steps of the church across the street from her home.

## Drama

1. Role-play the part of a medical examiner, detective, interviewer, track coach, family member, grief counselor, police inspector, witness, party guest, or neighbor of the Mackenzies. Explain how the story would change if Michael kept his fears to himself rather than confess them to Joe or if Amy reported to police that she saw Michael with the rifle.
2. Pantomime ways that people like Tom and Karen MacKenzie, Meredith Ward, the Sadowskis, Mr. Goldfarb, Darcy Kelly, or Pappy Ruggerio can help Michael, for example, by involving him in decision-making, providing moral support, and displaying confidence in him during interviews with law officers and the media.
3. Pantomime the abnormal personality traits and behaviors of Joe, particularly tough talk about drinking, sex, and lying to police about a theft from his Mustang. Determine why verbal posturing makes Joe seem more culpable and causes Michael to suspect Joe of firing the lethal shot.
4. Create a storyboard account of the gun gift, birthday party, shooting the rifle, studying news reports at the public library, keeping vigil at the church, car accident, and Joe's questioning. Indicate at what point Michael decides to confess.

## Education

1. Summarize rifle range training for teens. Include positive attitudes toward weaponry rather than as macho exhibitionism. Comment on Michael's need to impress Joe at the party.
2. Propose curriculum and readings for a class to help victims and survivors cope with trauma. Suggest activities that boost morale and ease feelings of guilt and powerlessness, for example, group therapy sessions, religious counseling, and literature on panic attacks and recurrent nightmares.
3. Compose a newspaper feature on methods of tightening gun safety laws. Summarize supervision methods in your area, especially those involving youthful shooters.

## Speech and Storytelling

1. Explain orally a character web indicating the need for counseling for troubled teens. Suggest questions that need answers: why dreams trouble Jenna, why Joe wants to be tough, what Michael gains by performing good deeds for the Ward family, how Amy came to have so poor a reputation, how the Briarwood Community Pool allows teens to gather and discuss police questioning, why Darcy Kelly creates a vicious lie to harm Amy, how Jenna and Jason investigate their feelings about talking on the phone shortly before the shooting, how long walks over town soothe Michael's fears, and why Michael takes refuge in games of Scrabble with Pappy and Amy.
2. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of ostracism, teen drinking, despair, suspect friends, gun possession, character assassination, an angry outburst after the car accident, and gossip on family and community life. Discuss reasons why male teens are more likely to commit vandalism and gun crimes than females. Support your opinions with statistics obtained from almanacs and economic, crime, and health surveys.
3. Explain to a small group the author's emphasis on self-esteem. Account for personal struggles in Michael that reduce his effectiveness as a son, brother, lifeguard, friend, citizen, and conspirator.
4. Record on tape your version of the Lenni Lenape legend of ancestral visits to the Ghost Tree.

## Cinema

1. View films with characters accused of crimes, such as *The Chocolate War*, *True Grit*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *West Side Story*, *We Were the Mulvaney's*, and *A Lesson before Dying*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and characters to those of *Swallowing Stones*.

## Science and Health

1. Draw a human form and explain how ballistics experts determine the trajectory of the bullet that struck Charlie Ward. How would experts use this information to map a four-block area from which the shot was fired?
2. Design a flow chart outlining first aid and follow-up treatment for panic attack or hyperventilation.

**Art**

1. Using desktop publishing or other media, design contrasting murals or posters to demonstrate these paired actions: sleeping in the Ghost Tree/sleeping in the garage, sitting on the church steps/practicing for the track team, visiting a pool as a guest/playing Scrabble, dancing at Steven Chang's party/digging up a rifle from a log pile, destroying a windshield/sitting in a treehouse, and reading newspapers at the library/cleaning gutters late at night.

**Law**

1. Read aloud state laws governing crimes mentioned in the novel, especially unlawful discharge of a firearm, providing alcohol to underage drinkers, lying to police, obstructing an investigation, careless driving, destruction of property, public drunkenness, driving without a license, and concealing evidence. Determine whether Joe or Michael is more deserving of jail time.
2. Suggest ways the shooting incident could have been avoided, for example, by careful removal of the firing pin, adult supervision of family guns and ammunition, and required training and licensing for young gun owners.

**Social Studies and Psychology**

1. Define social and emotional isolation. Explain why the term describes Meredith, Michael, and Amy. Summarize Darcy's unfair judgments of Amy and the effect on her family.
2. Describe the shift in Michael's thinking, especially during his last discussion with Joe, and last sleepless night. Why does Michael seem glad to sit near Jenna at the Ghost Tree until she awakens?
3. Lead a panel discussion of the effects of sudden death, loneliness, and guilt on family life. Suggest ways that Amy, Jenna, Pappy, and Meredith can help each other recover from loss.

**Mathematics and Computers**

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: anguished, disconcerting, Ivy League, pact, accessory to crime, cordoned, furtive, finesse, artful dodger, autopsy, ballistics, advisory, renegade, gyroscope, foraged, PVC, casing, speculated, composure, coordinates, Ash Wednesday, fiasco, melodramatics, conspiratorially, disdain, intuitively,

benediction, circumstantial evidence, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, engrossed, vagrancy, hyperventilating, allegedly, obstruction of justice, and vigil.

**Language and Journalism**

1. Write news releases for radio, television, or print announcing the death of Charlie Ward, the house-to-house investigation, theft of a rifle and CD player from Joe Sadowski's car, Michael's concealment of the weapon, and Joe's rage after Michael drives the Mustang into Amy's Tercel. Determine which style of coverage is fairer to victims, suspects, community, parents, and police.
2. Prepare a series of questions for police to ask each family during the neighborhood investigation. Separate questions into those appropriate for adults and those intended for youth, such as Josh, Michael, Amy, Jenna, Joe, and birthday party guests.

**Literature**

1. Draw a Venn diagram contrasting the behaviors, private thoughts, and attitudes of Meredith, Pappy, Amy, Michael, Jenna, Darcy, Joe, Jason, Andrea, and Doug Boyle. Determine which character bears the most private grief and regret.
2. Brainstorm a list suggesting other crime fiction, including Walter Dean Myers's *Monster* and *Shooter*, Tony Johnston's *Any Small Goodness*, Benjamin John Mikaelson's *Touching Spirit Bear*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* and *The Pigman's Legacy*, Ellen Raskin's *The Westing Game*, Lois Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin*, Ring Lardner's "Haircut," M. E. Kerr's *Gentlehands*, Susan Pfeffer's *The Year Without Michael*, Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* and *I Am the Cheese*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles," Joyce Carol Oates's "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?," and Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*. Post your list in the library for other readers to consult.
3. Compose a talk on the differences in community expectations for characters like a law enforcement officer, ballistics expert, teen suspect, chief of police, family member, witness, gossip, accomplice, widow, accident victim, lifeguard, and parents of a juvenile delinquent. Identify characters who suffer pre-judgement from the community and their peers.

4. Using a cause-and-effect chart, follow the plot of the novel from beginning to end. Stress these actions: concealing a weapon, aiding a teenage drunk, maligning a rival, spying through colored glasses, keeping a vigil, weeding a flower bed, failing a driving test, aiding the victim of a panic attack, and convincing authorities of innocence.

### **Alternate Assessment**

1. List examples of unruly behavior, violence, and crime in the lives of the characters, for example, firing a rifle in the city limits, lying to police, underage drinking at Steven Chang's party, Joe's dismissal for drinking on break, the collision between the Mustang and the Tercel, Darcy's lie about Amy and the track team, the shooting of Charlie Ward, Joe's angry attack on Amy's windshield, hiding the CD player in the attic, concealing the weapon in a PVC pipe, and driving without a license.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate isolation and anguish at home, at the community pool, during sleepless summer nights, at the police station, during telephone conversations, on the front steps of the church, in the garage, at the public library, at a movie at the mall, on a bus ride, and in the Great Swamp.
3. Compose a scene in which the Wards decide to seek family counseling to help them understand and accept the sudden death of Charlie Ward, the nightmares that plague Amy, Michael's careless shooting of the rifle in town, and Meredith and Amy's guilt.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including:  
Joe's anger and unruliness, Michael's sneaking around the Ward house at night, Amy's guilt for surviving the car wreck, Annie Rico's gossip, Tom's attempt to exonerate his son of the shooting, Darcy's jealousy and spite, Michael's lust for Amy, and Andrea's anger at Amy.
5. Introduce Michael's conversation with Amy after she wakes up in the old sycamore tree.

### **Teacher's Notes**

## Vocabulary

For each term, locate synonyms from the list below:

anguished, disconcerting, pact, accessory, cordoned, furtive, finesse, dodger, autopsy, ballistics, advisory, renegade, gyroscope, foraged, speculated, composure, coordinates, fiasco, melodramatics, conspiratorially, disdain, intuitively, benediction, circumstantial, resuscitation, engrossed, vagrancy, hyperventilating, allegedly, vigil

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. sneaky

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. disapproval

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. avoider

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. idleness

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. blessing

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. searched

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. outlaw

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. disaster

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. indirect

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. skill

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Identify the speaker of each of the following quotations from the novel and explain the significance.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. That rifle was locked in my gun cabinet in the basement.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I came to the movie alone.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. He looks like he could use a friend.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. They stole it right out of the car?

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Man, life really sucks, doesn't it?

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Partygoers have good reason to think that Joe Sadowski is a creep.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Meredith shares her daughter's feelings of guilt for Charlie's death.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Pappy lies to Michael about Amy's condition at the emergency room.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Jenna humiliates Andrea by trying to bring about a meeting between Andrea and Michael.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The clean gutters and weeded flower beds are evidence of Michael's concern for the Wards.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Dave Zelenski invades Steven Chang's party to arrest Joe for drunkenness.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Michael likes lifeguarding at the Briarwood Community Pool because he can spend his afternoons chatting with girls.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. At the Ghost Tree, Amy looks down in terror on Michael and his rifle.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. The driving test ends because Michael chooses to stop.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. The casing has Joe's fingerprint on it.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill each blank below with a word or phrase that completes the sentence.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ recalls groping Amy Ruggerio in the garage while \_\_\_\_\_ helped his mother in the kitchen.
2. The rifle is hidden in a PVC \_\_\_\_\_ under a stack of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. At the \_\_\_\_\_ at 5:30 P.M., \_\_\_\_\_ reads newspaper articles about the shooting death.
4. To conceal drunkenness, \_\_\_\_\_ sleeps in the MacKenzie's \_\_\_\_\_.
5. To avoid his parents' discussion of Mr. Ward's death, \_\_\_\_\_ goes to the pool, where he paints over \_\_\_\_\_.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe suspicions about Amy.
2. Explain how Joe responds to the police investigation.
3. Discuss Michael's need to keep watch at the Ward house.
4. Account for the legend of the Ghost Tree.
5. Summarize events that precede Amy's letter to Jenna.



## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of characters from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. You will use some answers more than once and some not at all.

- |          |             |                  |
|----------|-------------|------------------|
| A. Amy   | F. Karen    | K. Dave Zelenski |
| B. Doug  | G. Michael  | L. Jason         |
| C. Darcy | H. Joe      | M. Josh          |
| D. Tom   | I. Ralph    | N. Andrea        |
| E. Jason | J. Meredith | O. Mrs. Sadowski |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. locates a casing
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. breaks a windshield
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. talks to Jenna on the phone before the shooting
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. is eager to meet Michael
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. receives an antique as a gift
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. feels guilty about both parents' deaths
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. sleeps in the Ghost Tree
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. notices the weeded flower beds
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. calls Joe from the treehouse
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. fails a driving test
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. regrets taking Amy to a violent movie
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. lies about the track team's intent
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. watches R-rated movies with Michael
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. breaks Amy's bikini strap
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. sends a letter to a grieving girl

### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What does Doug carefully pick up?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Who is Jenna's best friend?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who wants Jenna to go for a walk?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Where does Michael find more newspaper reports on the investigation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Who thinks that Michael needs a new best friend?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What was Joe's birthday gift to Michael?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Who sees Michael leave the woods with the rifle?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What does Joe smash after the accident?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Where does Amy sleep to escape air conditioning?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Who allegedly encircles the tree?

**Comprehension Test B (Page 2)**

**Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. During the night,
  - A. fireworks conceal rifle fire.
  - B. Meredith begins cleaning the house to receive friends.
  - C. Michael locates a ladder.
  - D. Joe takes a sleeping bag from the MacKenzies' garage.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Amy offers Jenna
  - A. a crumpled paper towel.
  - B. proof that Joe is guilty.
  - C. an invitation to the pool party.
  - D. a ride to the emergency room.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Joe misses his
  - A. best friend.
  - B. CD player.
  - C. chance to plead guilty.
  - D. job that he lost for drinking on break time.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The girl drowns
  - A. at the Briarwood Community Pool.
  - B. while the lifeguard talks with girls.
  - C. among the Lenape at the Great Swamp.
  - D. from an obstruction in her throat.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The police identify
  - A. the sound of rifle fire over cherry bombs.
  - B. the boy who sits on the church steps.
  - C. the PVC pipe in the woodpile.
  - D. the cavalry bullet in the Wards' yard.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Jason
  - A. shares Jenna's guilt for talking on the phone too long.
  - B. invites a guest to the Briarwood Community Pool.
  - C. practices for the track team.
  - D. works math problems to soothe his worries.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The antique
  - A. reminds Pappy of his dead son.
  - B. sycamore in the Great Swamp survived an Indian war.
  - C. is a gift from Tom's father.
  - D. car smashes into the Tercel.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Before the test,
  - A. each lifeguard swims extra laps around the pool.
  - B. Michael practices parallel parking.
  - C. Jenna studies algebra.
  - D. Amy chooses to walk alone at the mall.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Meredith thinks that
  - A. being a widow is hard.
  - B. Amy's nightmares result from Fourth of July fireworks.
  - C. Briarwood community should demand more police patrols.
  - D. Darcy spreads lies.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Michael dreads
  - A. another fight with Darcy over Amy.
  - B. seeing Jenna at school.
  - C. a scolding from his grandfather.
  - D. encountering Joe at the police station.

**Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Explain why Joe appears to lack character.
- 2. Contrast the result of loss on Amy, Meredith, and Jenna.
- 3. Describe the investigation.
- 4. Describe Steven Chang's party.
- 5. Determine how Michael gets the courage to confess.

**Answer Key**

**Vocabulary**

- |                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. furtive     | 6. foraged        |
| 2. disdain     | 7. renegade       |
| 3. dodger      | 8. fiasco         |
| 4. vagrancy    | 9. circumstantial |
| 5. benediction | 10. finesse       |

**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

**Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)**

1. Tom MacKenzie, in defense of police insinuations that Michael is the shooter
2. Amy, whose comment suggests that she is lonely because of mistreatment by other teens
3. Jenna, who observes Michael in his Honda while his friends attend a party
4. Michael, in a made-up telephone conversation with Joe alerting him to the police investigation
5. Joe, who exhibits a defensive attitude toward a situation he helped to create

**Part II: True/False (20 points)**

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

**Part III: Completion (20 points)**

1. Michael, Darcy
2. pipe, firewood
3. library, Michael
4. Joe, garage
5. Michael, graffiti

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Answers will vary.

**COMPREHENSION TEST B**

**Part I: Matching (30 points)**

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

**Part II: Short Answer (20 points)**

- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. casing         | 6. Amy              |
| 2. Andrea         | 7. Amy              |
| 3. Jason          | 8. windshield       |
| 4. public library | 9. front porch      |
| 5. Darcy          | 10. ghost ancestors |

**Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A  |
| 2. A | 7. C  |
| 3. B | 8. B  |
| 4. D | 9. A  |
| 5. D | 10. B |

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Answers will vary.



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