



# Touching Spirit Bear

by Ben Mikaelson

## Teacher's Guide

Written By Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

**PERMA-BOUND**  
THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY

**LIVING  
LITERATURE  
SERIES**

**A Perma-Bound Production**

This guide was prepared using the HarperTrophy edition, ©2001. Other editions may differ.

## Synopsis

### Part One: Touching Spirit Bear

#### Chapter 1

Fifteen-year-old Cole Matthews from Minneapolis is being taken to a remote Alaskan island by his Indian parole officer Garvey and a Tlingit elder named Edwin. Cole is being banished to the island for a year as punishment for the latest in a string of crimes. This time, he beat ninth grader Peter Driscall within an inch of his life. Since their recent divorce, Cole's parents have not hurried to bail him out, as was their habit in the past. This unusual punishment was meted out by Circle Justice, a Native American custom, even though Cole is not Native American.

#### Chapter 2

Cole has no intention of giving up his anger and resentment to become what he calls a "sucker." Garvey hands Cole an ancestral blanket called an "at.óow." When Edwin and Garvey leave, Cole burns down the hut they have built for him and all the supplies.

#### Chapter 3

In a flashback, Cole remembers Garvey's visits to the detention center. Cole reveals that his father has beaten him viciously and his mother says nothing. She drinks heavily. Back in the present, Cole decides to swim off the island.

#### Chapter 4

In another flashback, Cole recalls the "Circle Justice," where the "Keeper" (the organizer) guides everyone to share their feelings about Cole and suggest appropriate punishment. Cole sees how badly he has hurt Peter, but he does not feel remorse.

#### Chapter 5

The tide carries Cole back to the island. He manages to make shore, exhausted. He sees a white Spirit Bear, thought by some to be a mystical imaginary animal, and threatens it, anger welling inside him.

#### Chapter 6

Back at the Circle, Cole vents his anger at his abusive, uncaring parents. His father doesn't even know the date of Cole's birthday! On the island, Cole clocks the tides for another escape attempt.

#### Chapter 7

The Bear reappears. Cole makes a spear and threatens to kill the creature. Cole takes a fish from some gulls and eats it. The Bear reappears and this time Cole heaves the spear at it.

#### Chapter 8

The Bear attacks and leaves Cole near death. Cole grabs a hunk of its fur, but that is scant consolation as he lies all alone, in horrible pain, in the rain. His arm is shattered and deep cuts have raked his chest.

#### Chapter 9

Cole feels like nothing has been his fault and he does not owe anyone anything. A terrible storm rages; never in his life has Cole felt so alone, so vulnerable, so exposed. The lightning knocks over a huge tree and Cole worries that the baby birds in the nest have been killed. It is the first time he has shown compassion for another creature.

#### Chapter 10

Cole lies in his own filth, covered in flies and mosquitoes. Fiercely uncomfortable, he drifts in and out of consciousness. In a desperate attempt to stay alive, he eats grass, worms, and insects.



## Chapter 11

Cole eats a live mouse and his own vomit. The Spirit Bear reappears and Cole tries to spit at it to have the last word, but his attempt misses the mark.

## Chapter 12

Cole realizes that he is totally powerless, at the mercy of the uncaring universe. The Bear returns and Cole feels a strange sense of trust. Cole realizes that he has missed so much beauty and joy because of his anger. Just as Cole is on the verge of death, Garvey rescues him.

## Chapter 13

Cole spends the night nursed by Rosey, Garvey, and Edwin, as they wait for the Medivac plane. Garvey reveals that he also had a very troubled youth. Cole vows to tell the truth from now on.

## Part Two Return to Spirit Bear

### Chapter 14

Six months later, Cole leaves the hospital. He does not have full use of his right arm, but some good has come out of this: his mother has spoken out against Cole's abusive father and stopped drinking. As a result, she and Cole are building a relationship. For the first time, Cole allows himself to be touched. The Circle meets again to decide what to do with Cole now: jail or back to the island?

### Chapter 15

People want to see Cole punished severely; the only person who speaks in Cole's defense is Garvey. Edwin demonstrates that people change two ways: with slow persistent pressure or with a single traumatic experience. Edwin believes that Cole's brush with death and the Spirit Bear have changed him for the better. Cole's response shows that he is really starting to mature and accept responsibility for his actions.

### Chapter 16

Thanks to Edwin and Garvey, Cole is allowed to return to the island for a year's banishment rather than going to jail. Garvey tells Cole to make his time on the island a celebration of life.

### Chapter 17

Cole is maturing: he sincerely hopes that Peter will be OK. Edwin takes Cole swimming to a frigid lake to help him deal with his rage. He tells Cole to get into the habit of being happy.

## Chapter 18

Cole builds his cabin during the day; at night, he, Garvey, and Edwin dance and talk. Edwin teaches Cole to carry a large rock (representing his ancestors) up a hill and then send it down the mountain (representing his anger).

## Chapter 19

That night, Cole does the wolf dance alone, and he realizes that he needs the help of others, as wolves do. Cole continues the rituals and realizes that he has to quit blaming others for his mistakes.

## Chapter 20

Before he leaves, Edwin gives Cole a large hunting knife and suggests that he also carve with it.

## Chapter 21

Cole drives himself hard and the next time Garvey and Edwin visit, he has built much furniture. Cole finds a log and starts making it into a canoe to use as an escape, but quickly decides to make it into a totem pole instead. On his next visit, Edwin tells Cole that Peter is deeply depressed over the attack and his injuries.

## Chapter 22

Cole keeps busy and fights to escape his rage.

## Chapter 23

Cole realizes that to be invisible, he has to clear his mind. He practices and does indeed see the Spirit Bear again. He does the Dance of Anger and asks forgiveness for hurting Peter.

## Chapter 24

Over the bitter winter, Cole is very lonely.

## Chapter 25

Edwin reports that Peter has twice tried to commit suicide. Cole suggests that Peter come to stay on the island to work through his rage as Cole has done. Peter and his parents arrive on the island, hostile and frightened of Cole—especially Peter.

## Chapter 26

Mr. and Mrs. Driscall leave, but Peter remains. Two weeks later, Peter is still very hostile.

**Chapter 27**

Peter destroys the bear that Cole had carved on his totem pole. Nonetheless, the boys slowly bond. The turning point comes when Peter repairs the damage he has done to Cole’s carving.

**Chapter 28**

Peter attacks Cole, beating him as Cole had done in the past. The Spirit Bear appears and Peter forgives Cole for his past cruelty. Cole gives Peter the atóow, the ceremonial blanket. The two boys together carve a perfect circle in the last space on Cole’s totem pole.

**Author Sketch**

Ben Mikaelson was born in 1952, in La Paz, Bolivia. He spent his early years in Bolivia, where he felt like an outsider. Mikaelson and a younger brother were placed in a boarding school apart from their older siblings. Mikaelson feels this drew him far apart from the rest of the family. When Mikaelson returned to the United States at the age of twelve, he found it difficult to adjust to American schools. “Being ostracized,” he said, “contributed to writing in the sense that a piece of paper became my friend. .... I never thought of myself as a writer, but I enjoyed writing poetry.” He attended Concordia College from 1971-72, then joined the Army for two years. After leaving the service, Mikaelson continued his education at Bemidji State University (1975-79). Mikaelson owned an office supply store and was a woodworker before becoming a writer. He always loved the outdoors and daredevil sports.



Being a writer, Mikaelson soon discovered, required just as much courage as being an adventurer. “There is so much more to writing than I ever dreamed,” he said. “I know when I first sat over the cliff at twenty feet above the water with nobody around, I looked down, and this monster was facing me, saying ‘you can’t do it.’ I said ‘I can’ and I jumped into the monster’s face. ... I began, finally, to realize that being a successful writer isn’t just putting the good words down, it’s facing that monster.”

In 1980, Mikaelson and his wife moved to the mountains of Bozeman, Montana. In 1984, the couple adopted Buffy, a declawed black bear cub, from a wild game farm. “I learned a real important lesson with Buffy,” he noted. “And that’s that you never tame a wild animal. Buffy is not a tame animal. If something threatens him, he is a six-hundred-and-some pound very, very dangerous animal.”

**Critic’s Corner**

Ben Mikaelson won the International Reading Association Award and the Western Writers Golden Spur Award. His novels have won critical acclaim, as well as several state reader’s choice awards. Critics praised *Touching Spirit Bear* for its suspense and realistic characters. For example, Emilie Coulter in Amazon.com noted: “Ben Mikaelson’s depiction of a juvenile delinquent’s metamorphosis into a caring, thinking individual is exciting and fascinating, if at times heavy-handed. Cole’s nastiness and the vivid depictions of the lengths he must go to survive after the (equally vivid) attack by the bear are excruciating at times, but the concept of finding a way to heal a whole community when one individual wrongs another is compelling.”

Joel Shoemaker in *School Library Journal*, praised Mikaelson’s portrayal of Cole as “dead on.” The ending was “unlikely,” Shoemaker noted, but “it sure works well as an adventure story with strong moral underpinnings.” Marta Segal, reviewing the novel for the *American Library Association*, said, “Mikaelson is at his best when using the story to explain other cultures.” *Kirkus Reviews* called the novel “a realistic portrait of an unlikable young punk”: *Voice of Youth Advocates* said, “[Cole’s story] will fascinate young and old, and have everyone waiting for the sequel.”

**Other Books by the Author**

- Countdown* (1996)
- Petey* (1998)
- Red Midnight* (2002)
- Rescue Josh McGuire* (1991)
- Sparrow Hawk Red* (1993)
- Stranded* (1995)
- Tree Girl* (2004)

## Bibliography

*Booklist*, August 1993, p. 206; January 1, 1997, p. 856.  
DeCandido, GraceAnne. *Booklist*, November 1, 1998, pp. 484-85.  
Katka, Pat. *School Library Journal*, May, 1993, p. 127.  
Moses-Allen, Brenda. *Voice of Youth Advocates*, June, 1997, p. 112.  
Sparanese, Ann C. *Voice of Youth Advocates*, December, 1995, p. 306.

## General Objectives

1. To analyze the importance of love and acceptance
2. To understand forgiveness
3. To define maturity
4. To probe the corrosive effects of child abuse
5. To explore the issue of family communication
6. To recognize the healing quality of nature
7. To understand the novel's title
8. To analyze different characters
9. To probe the causes and effects of rage
10. To assess different forms of justice

## Specific Objectives

1. To see why Edwin and Garvey work to save Cole
2. To understand why Cole comes to forgive himself
3. To analyze the reasons for Cole's fury
4. To assess personal responsibility
5. To trace Cole's gradual maturity
6. To analyze life on the island
7. To understand what the Spirit Bear symbolizes
8. To grasp why Cole's father beats his son
9. To compare and contrast Cole's parents
10. To identify the novel's structure, especially its climax

## Literary Terms and Applications

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

**Flashback:** a scene that breaks into the story to show an earlier part of the action. Early chapters in *Touching Spirit Bear* are constructed as flashbacks to fill in missing information, explain the characters' actions, and advance the plot.

**Theme:** the main idea in a literary work, the author's general statement about life. The theme of *Touching Spirit Bear* concerns the importance of forgiveness. Cole's father, himself a victim of child abuse, beats Cole viciously; Cole's mother, an alcoholic, does not come to her son's aid. With the help of Garvey, Edwin, and nature, Cole learns to forgive those who have hurt him and to forgive himself for hurting others.

**Symbol:** a person, place, or object that represents an abstract idea. For example, a dove may symbolize peace. In this novel, the Spirit Bear in the title symbolizes the importance of putting others before self, of becoming part of the circle of society, nature, and mortality.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Nonfiction

William Bayer, *The Dream of the Broken Horses*  
Carla Fine, *No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One*  
Kay Redfield Jamison, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*  
Chuck Palahniuk, *Survivor*

### Fiction

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*  
Lynne Ewing, *Drive-By and Party Girl*  
Sharon G. Flake, *The Skin I'm In*  
S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*  
Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*  
John Neufeld, *Lisa, Bright and Dark*

### AudioCassettes

*Touching Spirit Bear*. AudioFile 2002, Portland, Maine  
read by Lee Terlesen

### Websites

Ben Mikaelson's Web site  
<http://www.benmikaelsen.com>  
Author Interview: Ben Mikaelson  
<http://www.falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/mikaelsen.htm>

### Videos/Films

*Bears* (2002)  
*Gentle Ben* (2002)  
*Real Animals: A Day with Bears* (1998)

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Ben Mikaelson's *Touching Spirit Bear* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- animals, real and legendary
- child abuse
- drinking
- friendship
- grief and loss
- loyalty
- maturity
- Native American culture
- nature
- suicide

### Motifs

- coping with guilt and grief
- coping with setbacks and personal problems
- dealing with child abuse
- establishing communication with parents and peers
- exploring alternate forms of punishment
- overcoming divorce and alcoholism
- seeking help for suicidal impulses
- seeing punishment as a route to maturity
- understanding the importance of friendship
- using nature to help someone mature

## Meaning Study

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

1. To Cole, this was just another big game. (Chap. 1, p. 5)  
*(When the novel opens, Cole is being banished to a remote Alaskan island. He is so filled with rage that he does not understand the significance of the chance he is being given. Garvey and Edwin want to help Cole overcome his years of abuse, but he resists all assistance.)*
2. "In Circle Justice, you sign a healing contract." (Chap. 1, p. 12)  
*(Cole is offered an unusual, humane form of punishment, designed far more for rehabilitation. Rather than being jailed, he is offered the chance to work with a group to help make things right again.)*

3. "You are only its caretaker for a time." (Chap. 2, p. 21)  
*(Garvey gives Cole his at.óow, a blanket that has been handed down for generations. Cole must promise to care for the at.óow and then pass it on to someone else he trusts. In so doing, Cole will better understand that no man is an island; rather, we are all dependent on each other.)*
4. "Honey, you're hurting him." (Chap. 6, p. 64)  
*(The only time that Cole's mother came to her son's defense during a beating, Cole's father threatened to beat her as well. In this scene, we see his mother's fear, his father's brutality, and the family's disintegration.)*
5. Cole blinked in stunned realization. He had always been this weak. (Chap. 9, p. 92)  
*(Near death, Cole suddenly realizes that he had never truly controlled anything. This is a major breakthrough in his maturation.)*
6. "All life is a hot dog." (Chap. 16, p. 166)  
*(Garvey and Edwin teach Cole many things, perhaps the most important is how to appreciate life. Here, they help Cole make his time on the island a celebration of being alive. Cole learns this lesson well.)*
7. What a fool he had been. Things could be different. (Chap. 19, p. 198)  
*(As he bathes in the frigid pond and carries the rock up the hill, Cole suddenly understands that he has to quit blaming others, including his father, for his problems. He understands that he is not a bad person.)*
8. "Please forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt Peter!" (Chap. 23, p. 231)  
*(As he does his "Dance of Anger," Cole feels an overwhelming sense of shame. He understands how he has destroyed Peter's life.)*
9. "It isn't enough to be sorry and forgive." (Chap. 24, p. 235)  
*(Cole realizes that sorrow isn't enough; somehow, he must figure out a way to help Peter. If he can't help Peter, then he must help someone else as a way to expiate his sin.)*
10. Not twenty feet away, it stood watching them: the Spirit Bear. (Chap. 28, p. 284)  
*(The novel revolves around the image of the Spirit Bear. We never learn whether it is real or imaginary, but it is a key means by which Cole comes to realize his selfishness and cruelty.)*

## 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 is "Circle Justice"?  
*(Based on Native American traditions, it is a way to deal with transgressors in which victim, offender, and community all work together to find a healing solution.)*
2. Why is Cole sent to the island?  
*(He is banished for a year as punishment for beating Peter Driscal nearly to death, the latest in a series of crimes.)*
3. Why does Garvey help Cole?  
*(Garvey sees a lot of himself in Cole. When he was Cole's age, Garvey spent five years in prison for his crimes. He helps Cole to prevent others from suffering as he did.)*
4. According to Cole, how do you become invisible?  
*(You clear your mind and give up all control. Being invisible means not being sensed or felt.)*
5. What did Cole learn while he was on the island?  
*(He discovers who he really is. In so doing, he matures.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What can you tell about Cole's father from the fact that he does not know his son's birthday?  
*(This detail reveals that Mr. Matthews really does not know his son at all, nor does he care to. Mr. Matthews is all about control and domination, not nurturing or love.)*
7. What is Cole's main problem?  
*(Possible responses: Cole blames others for his crimes; he has a bad attitude; he has been abused and so he abuses others; he has never been parented with love and concern.)*
8. Why do Cole and Peter carve a circle at the end of Cole's totem pole?  
*(Every part of a circle is both a beginning and an end and everything is one. The circle shows that Cole now knows and accepts his place in the world.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What do the baby sparrows symbolize or represent in this novel?  
*(Possible response: The sparrows symbolize helplessness. In this scene, Cole is like the birds, at the mercy of nature.)*
10. What does Cole give Peter at the end of the novel? What does the gift mean?  
*(Cole gives Peter the at.óow, which shows that Cole is passing on trust.)*

### Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss some ways that you might have coped with Cole's situation in his place.
12. Debate how Cole's life would have been different if he had not been allowed to return to the island after being mauled by Spirit Bear.

## Across the Curriculum

### Art and Music

1. Cole says that his mother looks like a "Barbie doll." Dress a Barbie doll to look like Cole's mother in the beginning of the novel.
2. Design a poster for a movie version of *Touching Spirit Bear*.
3. Divide a piece of paper in half lengthwise. On the left, draw Cole's life before his year on the island. On the right, draw his life after.
4. Choose a dramatic scene and select background music. Play the music for the class as you read the scene.
5. Cole's father does not know when Cole was born. Choose a date for Cole's birthday and make a birthday card for him.
6. Write a song of friendship for Cole. Share the song with your friends.
7. Carve a miniature totem pole out of soap. Include the same animals that Cole does or choose animals that represent you.

**Drama**

1. Role-play a scene between Cole and his father, in which Cole expresses his feeling about the abuse he suffered at his father's hands.
2. Deliver a speech about the dangers of going into nature unprepared.
3. Dramatize a counseling session between Cole's parents before their divorce.
4. Debate whether Cole received the appropriate punishment for his crime.
5. Speaking as Judge Tanner, pass an alternative sentence on Cole.
6. Do one of the dances described in the novel, such as the Dance of the Whale or the Dance of the Wolf.

**Geography/History**

1. Is there such a thing as a Spirit Bear? Find out.
2. Make a map of Alaska. Locate an island where Cole could have been sent for his banishment.
3. Report on the Tlingit Indians. Where do they live? What do they believe? Analyze whether Garvey is typical of his fellow tribe members. Tell why or why not.
4. Locate Minneapolis on a map. Calculate how far it is from your hometown to Minneapolis.

**Language Arts**

1. Create a new title for the novel and explain its significance.
2. Explain the Japanese proverb that introduces the novel: "Fall seven times, stand up eight."
3. Edwin explains that to members of his Native American tribe, animals are symbols for people. Choose an animal to symbolize you. In a paragraph, explain the symbolism.
4. Writing as Cole, draft three journal entries: one as you are sentenced to banishment on the island, one after you are attacked by the

bear, and one at the end, after you and Peter carve the circle on the totem pole. In each entry, explain how you feel about your actions, your punishment, and your parents.

5. Rewrite one chapter from Peter's point of view. Chapters 27 and 28 are especially well suited for this assignment.
6. Create a character sketch of Peter, Edwin, or Garvey.
7. In your own words, state the novel's theme or message.
8. Writing as Mrs. Matthews, send a letter or e-mail to Cole explaining how you came to marry and divorce your husband. Analyze your actions and their effect on Cole, too.

**Math**

1. Garvey calls Cole "Einstein." Explain Einstein's theories.
2. Find out how many teenagers commit suicide every year.

**Science/Health**

1. Report on Circle Justice. Decide if you endorse this unorthodox method of punishment or not.
2. Imagine that you were going to a remote Alaskan Island for a year, as Cole does. List the items you would need not only to survive, but also to stay healthy and safe.
3. Cole watches the tides to decide when to escape from the island. Report on the tides. Explain their cause, effects, and how to time them.
4. Learn more about orca whales. Show your findings on a web page.
5. Make a star map for your region. Explain the primary stars to the class.
6. Cole is nearly killed by lightning. Create a brochure on lightning safety.

### **Alternate Assessment**

1. Hold a Circle Justice and decide what punishment is appropriate for Cole's crimes. Think of a way that he can repay his debt to society as well as heal himself.
2. Stage a dramatic reading of a key chapter in the novel.
3. Make a character list and explain what function each character serves in the novel.
4. Imagine that you were producing a movie version of *Touching Spirit Bear*. Cast the main characters.
5. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.

### **Teacher's Notes**



## Vocabulary

Complete the following essay with words from the word box. Use each word only once.

application	defiantly	flannel	medication	smirked
banishment	detention	frigid	mock	sponsor
barrage	eerie	hibernate	persistent	sullen
caretaker	elder	humility	psychologist	swarms
caulking	eternity	incessant	receding	totem
chafed	feign	inferno	skiff	vulnerable

Cole Matthews (1) \_\_\_\_\_ at the rules he had to obey. He would (2) \_\_\_\_\_ his parents by making fun of them behind their back and (3) \_\_\_\_\_ or pretend to listen to them. His parents got especially annoyed when he (4) \_\_\_\_\_ with a sarcastic grin on his face. Cole's (5) \_\_\_\_\_, moody behavior annoyed them. As a result, they were not upset when the Circle Justice decided on Cole's (6) \_\_\_\_\_. They felt that getting away from people might teach Cole some (7) \_\_\_\_\_ and humbleness.

Cole was so lonely on the island that the year felt like a(n) (8) \_\_\_\_\_. "I'll be here forever!" he often thought. The (9) \_\_\_\_\_, nonstop biting of the mosquitoes left him sore and bloody. The (10) \_\_\_\_\_ surrounded him like a blanket of pain. The (11) \_\_\_\_\_ of falling acorns almost sounded like gunfire! The daily, (12) \_\_\_\_\_ rain left him always soggy; the (13) \_\_\_\_\_ water felt like ice on his sore skin. At night, the silence was spooky and (14) \_\_\_\_\_, like being in a haunted house. Cole was so angry that he thought he would never want to see the (15) \_\_\_\_\_ again, but it was a relief to see the boat gliding over the water as Edwin and Garvey visited every few weeks.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part I: 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.

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| ___ 1. A Native American parole officer                           | A. Cole Matthews       |
| ___ 2. The judge who sentences Cole                               | B. Edwin               |
| ___ 3. Cole's mother, an alcoholic                                | C. Spirit Bear         |
| ___ 4. Cole's high-priced defense lawyer                          | D. Garvey              |
| ___ 5. The Tlingit elder who helps Cole                           | E. Peter Driscall      |
| ___ 6. The woman who runs the Circle Justice                      | F. Nathaniel Blackwood |
| ___ 7. The boy Cole beats up, leaving him permanently disabled    | G. Judge Tanner        |
| ___ 8. The novel's main character, a juvenile delinquent          | H. Rosey               |
| ___ 9. The woman who nurses Cole after he is attacked by the bear | I. the Keeper          |
| ___ 10. The large white bear                                      | J. Mrs. Matthews       |

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

Mark the following statements T if they are true or F if they are false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Cole Matthews is a Native American from Alaska.
- \_\_\_ 2. Peter beat up Cole because Cole had insulted his culture.
- \_\_\_ 3. On the island, Cole burns down the hut built for him; he also destroys all the supplies.
- \_\_\_ 4. Cole successfully swims off the island and hides in Minnesota.
- \_\_\_ 5. On the island, Spirit Bear attacks Cole and leaves him very badly injured.
- \_\_\_ 6. During a terrible storm on the island, a huge tree is knocked down and Cole worries that the little baby birds in the nest have been killed.
- \_\_\_ 7. In a desperate attempt to stay alive, Cole eats grass, worms, insects – even a live mouse!
- \_\_\_ 8. After being attacked by the bear, Cole spends a few days in the hospital and recovers fully from his injuries.
- \_\_\_ 9. Thanks to Edwin and Garvey, Cole is allowed to return to the island for a year's banishment rather than going to jail.
- \_\_\_ 10. Peter comes to stay on the island to work through his rage as Cole has done.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Motivation (30 points)

Complete each sentence below with a reason or explanation.

1. Cole Matthews is taken to a remote island because
2. Cole agrees to go to the island because
3. Cole is filled with rage because
4. Garvey helps Cole because
5. Mr. Matthews has been arrested for
6. Edwin believes that Cole has changed for the better due to
7. Edwin takes Cole swimming to a frigid lake to
8. Garvey and Edwin make Cole build his own cabin the second time because
9. Edwin and Garvey keep returning to the island to
10. Peter destroys the bear that Cole had carved on the totem pole because

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Which characters in *Touching Spirit Bear* do you find most admirable? Why?
2. Explain how Cole changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.
3. Analyze the role of nature in this novel.
4. Explain what you learned about dealing with anger and abuse from this novel.

## Comprehension Test B

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

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

1. When the novel opens, Cole Matthews is **(15, 37)** years old.
2. Cole comes from **(Alaska, Minneapolis)**, where he was born and raised.
3. Cole's fate is decided by **(Circle Justice, Square Logic)**.
4. During meetings about Cole's fate, people are not supposed to talk unless they are holding a **(bear paw, feather)**.
5. Garvey gives Cole an ancestral blanket called a(n) **("wow," "at.óow")**.
6. The **("Mother," "Keeper")** guides everyone to share their feelings as Cole's fate is decided.
7. Cole is upset that his father doesn't even know Cole's **(latest crime, birthday)**.
8. During a fierce storm on the island, Cole is upset that baby **(birds, raccoons)** have been killed when a tree crashed.
9. In a desperate attempt to stay alive, Cole eats grass, worms, and even a live **(bird, mouse)**!
10. Cole is rescued by **(Garvey, his mother)**.

### Part II: Matching (20 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.

- |                 |                        |                  |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|
| A. Judge Tanner | E. Peter Driscall      | H. Rosey         |
| B. Spirit Bear  | F. Nathaniel Blackwood | I. the Keeper    |
| C. Edwin        | G. Cole Matthews       | J. Mrs. Matthews |
| D. Garvey       |                        |                  |

- \_\_\_\_ 1. The best nurse in Drake
- \_\_\_\_ 2. The young man who tries to kill himself twice
- \_\_\_\_ 3. Cole's mother, described as a "Barbie doll"
- \_\_\_\_ 4. The woman who keeps order as Cole's sentence is decided
- \_\_\_\_ 5. The victim of brutal child abuse; the novel's main character
- \_\_\_\_ 6. The creature that nearly kills Cole
- \_\_\_\_ 7. Cole's attorney, hired by Mr. Matthews
- \_\_\_\_ 8. The Judge who tries to sentence Cole to jail
- \_\_\_\_ 9. A Native American elder who helps Cole deal with his anger
- \_\_\_\_ 10. A Native American parole officer who takes a sincere interest in Cole

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the novel.

1. the feather
2. the at.óow
3. the totem pole
4. the island
5. Spirit Bear

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Garvey and Edwin decide to help Cole.
2. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and resolution.
3. Describe the novel's setting and explain its importance to the story.
4. Describe the author's theme or message in this novel.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |            |               |                |
|------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1. chafed  | 6. banishment | 11. barrage    |
| 2. mock    | 7. humility   | 12. persistent |
| 3. feign   | 8. eternity   | 13. frigid     |
| 4. smirked | 9. incessant  | 14. eerie      |
| 5. sullen  | 10. swarms    | 15. skiff      |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

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

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

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

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

#### Part III: Motivation (30 points)

1. he is being banished from society for a year as punishment for his crimes
2. he thinks it will be easier to escape from the island than from jail
3. his father beats him; he feels that no one loves him
4. he also had a very troubled youth and he is trying to atone for his misdeeds
5. beating Cole
6. his brush with death and the Spirit Bear
7. help him deal with his rage
8. they want to teach him responsibility
9. check that Cole is all right
10. Peter is filled with rage against Cole

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

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

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

- |                   |             |
|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. 15             | 6. "Keeper" |
| 2. Minneapolis    | 7. birthday |
| 3. Circle Justice | 8. birds    |
| 4. feather        | 9. mouse    |
| 5. "at.óow"       | 10. Garvey  |

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

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

#### Part III: Identification (30 points)

1. The feather is used to keep order during Circle Justice. The person holding the feather has the floor and is allowed to talk.
2. The at.óow is the traditional Native American blanket that Garvey gives to Cole. It represent trust and heritage. During Cole's time on the island, it offers him great comfort as a security blanket. Cole is supposed to pass the at.óow on when he no longer needs it; indeed, he gives it to Peter at the end of the novel.
3. Cole and Peter carve totem poles as a way of venting their anger, expressing their creativity, and connecting with nature. Cole's totem pole shows animals from whom he has learned important lessons in patience, survival, and other skills.
4. The island where Cole is banished helps him learn to be independent and deal with his immaturity. By the end of the year, Cole has come to terms with his role in his actions. He has stopped blaming others for their shortcomings and his own.
5. Spirit Bear is a huge white bear that mauls Cole, leaving him near death. When Cole gets in touch with himself and nature, the bear comes to him and seems to bless him.

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

Answers will vary.

The logo for Perma-Bound features the brand name in a bold, stylized, italicized font. The letters are thick and black, with a registered trademark symbol (®) at the end. The text is set against a white background with a decorative, wavy underline.

**THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY**

#### Perma-Bound

617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650  
Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169  
E-Mail: [books@perma-bound.com](mailto:books@perma-bound.com)

#### Perma-Bound Canada

Box 868, Station Main • Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7A2  
Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811  
E-Mail: [perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca](mailto:perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca)

Visit us online at [www.perma-bound.com](http://www.perma-bound.com)