



Witness

Karen Hesse

Teacher's Guide

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LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A Perma-Bound Production

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Synopsis

Act One

Written in free verse and based on real events, the novel opens in a bucolic little Vermont town in 1924. Eleven different speakers explain what happens when the Ku Klux Klan tries to establish a power base there. Seeking to make a new start after his wife's death, Jewish shoe salesman Ira Hirsh moves to the town with his six-year-old daughter Esther. They live with Sara Chickering, a farmer, who develops a great fondness for Esther. Also new to town is Leanora Sutter, age twelve, and her father, who are black. Willie Pettibone (son of shopkeepers Harvey and Viola) and some of the other boys make racist comments to Leanora. Like his son, Harvey feels drawn to the Klan, but Viola recognizes them as the thugs they are. Johnny Reeves, a minister in the town, eagerly joins the Klan.

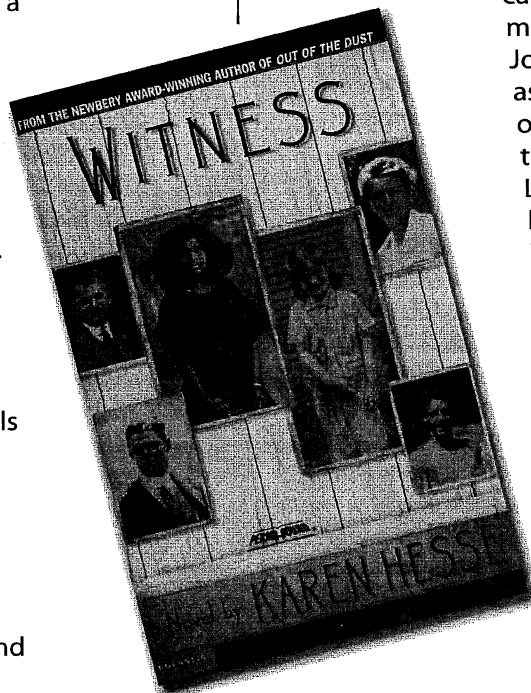
Act Two

News of the sensational Leopold and Loeb case temporarily pushes Klan events to the background. Leanora helps Mr. Field, an aged white neighbor, and is thrilled by his stories of the heroic all-black Civil War regiment. Fifteen-year-old Mary, living in an orphanage in Burlington, wants to marry her eighteen-year-old boyfriend Merlin van Tornhout, but Merlin fears that marrying her will hurt his standing with the Klan because she bought her shoes from Mr. Hirsh. Nonetheless, Merlin takes her from the orphanage, which leads to his arrest for kidnapping. Johnny and his fellow Klansman Merlin burn a huge cross. They throw a hate letter wrapped around a rock through Sara's window, too, threatening to tar and feather Ira Hirsh if he doesn't move

out of Sara's farm. Ira offers to move out, but Sara angrily refuses to let them go, for they have become like family.

Act Three

Percell Johnson, the town constable, catches Iris Weaver transporting bootlegged liquor, but the male passenger in her car takes the blame and the resulting jail sentence. Newspaper editor Reynard Alexander states that no good can come from the Klan and its message of hate. Meanwhile, Johnny Reeves basks in his role as a Klan leader. Esther wanders on to the train tracks, ignoring the oncoming locomotive. Leanora grabs Esther and rolls her to safety, saving her life. The Klan sends an anonymous letter to the newspaper about the incident, vowing to tie both children to the train tracks next time. Merlin reveals that he saw Esther in the path of the oncoming train but made no move to save her. John Philip Sousa gives a concert in town. Sara takes Esther to the circus, to the child's delight. Merlin reveals that Reynard Alexander bailed him out of jail, gave him a job with the newspaper, and even gave him keys to the building. No one had ever trusted Merlin like that before. Sara takes Esther to the fair, where Esther delights in the animals and their names. She is repelled at a booth where people take shots at a black person's head. Merlin picks up a hitchhiking Klansman, who mugs him and takes his car. Merlin lies to everyone, telling the town that he "gave" his car to a Klansman. Esther and her father attend synagogue for the Jewish high holy days.



Act Four

Leanora greatly enjoys her time helping Mr. Field. Dressed in his Klan robes, Harvey Pettibone raids a hotel and smashes the liquor bottles, to Viola's dismay. Fear and tension intensify. The Klan threatens newspaper editor Reynard Alexander. Tension is again relieved when Sara dresses Esther for Halloween, to the child's great delight. The Klan throws Johnny Reeves out for forcing himself on a child. Harvey gives Merlin and his fellow Klansmen some rat poison to use to defile the well and poison the Hirshes and Sara Chickering. Before the Klansmen can poison the well, someone shoots Ira through the door, narrowly missing Esther, who was sitting in his lap. When Merlin runs away because he is unable to poison the well, he is blamed for shooting Ira Hirsh. Viola gives all of Harvey's records and his phonograph, his most beloved possessions, to the Winslow Home for the Aged as expiation for his involvement with the Klan.

Act Five

As the town searches for the shooter, readers learn that Leanora knows that Merlin didn't shoot Ira Hirsh, because she saw Merlin at the well. Esther saw the shooter, Johnny Reeves. Iris sees Merlin on the road in Plattsburg, but he denies his identity and runs away. Since she was running rum at the time, Iris decides not to tell his family that she saw him alive and well. Johnny Reeves commits suicide, jumping from the steel bridge, but his body is never found. The country elects Coolidge as president. Merlin returns home and Constable Johnson arrests him for the attempted murder of Ira Hirsh. Merlin reveals that he came home because he sees Johnny Reeves following him. Merlin explains that he could never hurt Ira Hirsh because Hirsh had been so good to him, giving him galoshes for his girlfriend Mary. The Klan's influence vanishes when the Vermont government rejects their petition to do business in their state. With the Klan gone, Harvey and Viola are reconciled. Leanora tells the truth about what she saw that night and Merlin is freed. Merlin is shocked to learn that Johnny Reeves jumped from the bridge and is dead.

Timeline

- 1920** First cross-country airmail flight in the U.S.
18th Amendment: prohibits the production and sale of alcohol, including beer.
19th Amendment gives American women the vote.
Gandhi emerges as leader in India's struggle for independence.
KDKA begins regular schedule, starting the era of radio broadcasting.
Sound recording is done electrically. "Talkies" will follow.
In England, Marconi creates the first short wave radio connection.
- 1921** Ku Klux Klan activities become violent around the southern U.S.
Baseball's World Series is reported by radio.
Bessie Smith's first record ushers in the style of music called "the blues."
Western Union begins wirephoto service.
Skywriting invented.
- 1922** Ku Klux Klan gains political power.
Comic Monthly, a magazine reprint of comic strips, foreshadows comic books.
RCA radio-faxes a photo across the Atlantic Ocean in six minutes.
Mussolini forms Fascist government.
Britain gets its first radio station.
40 million movie tickets sold weekly in the U.S.
The first portable radio. Experimental car radio made.
- 1923** Teapot Dome oil scandal hearings in Washington, D.C.
Martial law established in Oklahoma to protect people and property from attacks by the Ku Klux Klan.
Vladimir Zworykin patents the first electronic camera tube, the iconoscope.
Neon signs invented.
Harlem's Cotton Club presents all-black entertainment to all-white audiences.
Kodak introduces home movie equipment.
- 1924** U.S. bill limits immigration; excludes all Japanese.
Calvin Coolidge wins U.S. presidency.
The first Walt Disney cartoon, *Alice's Wonderland*.
Daily coast-to-coast air mail service.
- 1925** Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming becomes the first woman governor in America.

Transcontinental radio hook-up carries President Coolidge's inaugural to 24 stations.

Grand Ole Opry begins in Nashville.
The first volume of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

Warner Bros. starts experiments to make "talkies," movies with a sound track.

1926 The Scholastic Aptitude Exam (SAT) is first administered.

The first weather map is televised.
Robert Goddard launches the first liquid-fuel rocket.
Don Juan, the first publicly shown "talkie," opens.

1927 Economic system collapses in Germany. Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* is the first popular "talkie."

1928 Amelia Earhart is the first woman to fly across the Atlantic.
Television sets are put in three U.S. homes, programming begins.
Disney adds sound to cartoons; *Steamboat Willie* introduces Mickey Mouse.
The newest dance craze is the Charleston.
In Schenectady, N.Y., the first scheduled television broadcasts.

1929 Museum of Modern Art opens in New York.
"Black Friday" stock market crash plunges the nation into the Great Depression.

Background on the 1920s

For Americans, the 1920s were a time of previously unknown prosperity because manufacturing was booming and work abounded. As a result, people had luxuries they had never before enjoyed, such as movies, radios, record players and cars were becoming accessible to the general population with the newly-invented Model T Ford, radios, record players, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. However, this great boom had a seamy underside.

President Harding's term of office was marked by corruption, most notably the Teapot Dome scandal. Later, into Coolidge's term, gangsters and bootleggers circumvented Prohibition to spark a huge crime wave, including murder, gambling, and extortion. Disillusioned by what they saw as mindless consumerism and political corruption, many intellectuals decamped to Europe, including Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein.

Waves of immigration were welcomed by some and attacked by others, most notably the Ku Klux Klan, which had been established in the South around 1865 to prevent freed slaves from gaining citizenship. In the 1920s, the Klan attacked blacks, immigrants, Catholics, Communists, Jews, and advocates of evolution. Spreading into all parts of America, the Klan attempted to create fear of "outsiders" and promote "American" values.

The Klan had thousands of supporters in Vermont during the 1920s, but its support diminished within a decade because of a raid on a Burlington church, the Depression, and financial corruption.

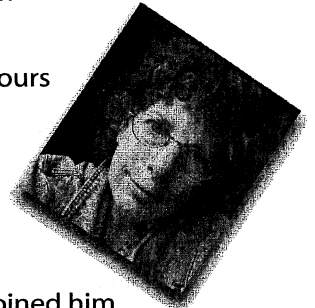
Author Sketch

Karen Hesse was born in 1952, in Baltimore, MD. She has worked as a teacher, librarian, advertising secretary, typesetter, and proofreader, as well as a writer. She and her family live in Vermont.

A bookish child, Hesse spent hours in the bough of an apple tree reading. "Often my bony bottom would go numb, but I loved it up there so much, I ignored the discomfort."

Hesse's father was a collection agent, and Hesse sometimes joined him on his rounds, which taught her to feel sympathy for people less well off. Her parents divorced, and Hesse's mother remarried. Although Hesse grew fond of her stepfather and stepsister, her grades were not good in the first two years of high school. Nonetheless, she was admitted to Towson State College, but eloped and left college the following year. Shortly thereafter, Hesse's husband shipped out with the Navy for Vietnam. While her husband was overseas, Hesse finished her BA at the University of Maryland and started writing. It was not until 1991, however, that Hesse published her first children's book, *Wish on a Unicorn*, launching her career.

"I love writing," Hesse explained in an interview. "I can't wait to get to my desk every morning. I wish everyone felt that way about their chosen profession...The thing about writing . . . until your words become a book you can change them, mold them, shape and reshape them until they look and sound and feel precisely the way you want."



Critic's Corner

The novels of Newbery Medal winner Karen Hesse are celebrated for their lyrical prose, compelling plots, and fascinating characters. *Witness*, as with Hesse's other novels, has received excellent reviews. *Publishers Weekly*, for example, wrote that "... this lyrical novel powerfully records waves of change and offers insightful glimpses into the hearts of victims, their friends and their enemies." Celeste Steward, writing in *School Library Journal* calls *Witness* "quietly moving, powerful." Hazel Rochman, reviewing the novel for *Booklist*, was equally enthusiastic: "Hesse's spare writing leaves space for readers to imagine more about that time and about their own."

Other Works by the Author

Wish on a Unicorn, 1991

Letters from Rifka, 1992

Poppy's Chair, 1993

Lester's Dog, 1993

Lavender, 1993

Sable, 1994

Phoenix Rising, 1994

A Time of Angels, 1995

The Music of Dolphins, 1996

Out of the Dust, 1997

Rain, 1998

Just Juice, 1998

Aleutian Sparrow, 2003

Further Readings about the Author

ALAN Review, spring, 1998, p. 50.

Authors & Artists for Young Adults. Volume 27.
Detroit: Gale Research, 1999.

Contemporary Authors. Volume 168. Detroit: Gale Research, 1999.

Five Owls, May-June, 1996, pp. 116-117; January-February, 1998, pp. 60-61.

Horn Book, July-August, 1991, pp. 457-458;
September-October, 1992, p. 585; March-April, 1994, pp. 190-191; July-August, 1994, p. 452;
September-October, 1994, p. 599; September-October, 1995, p. 634; January-February, 1998, p. 73; July-August, 1998, pp. 422-427, 428-432.

New York Times, January 13, 1998, p. B3.

Publishers Weekly, June 29, 1992, p. 64; August 30, 1993, p. 95; October 25, 1993, p. 59; October 23, 1995, p. 70; September 2, 1996, p. 131; August 25, 1997, pp. 72-73; November 3, 1997, p. 50; September 21, 1998, p. 85.

Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Volume 25, Volume 74, Gale 1998.

St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers. Second edition. Edited by Tom Pendergast and Sara Pendergast. Detroit: St. James Press, 1999.

Earlier editions published as *Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers*.

General Objectives

1. To appreciate the author's use of free verse
2. To understand the novel's title
3. To recognize the importance of setting
4. To assess each character's personality
5. To recognize the novel's theme and lessons that it teaches
6. To understand why people feel prejudice and hatred
7. To explore the ways kindness can be shown
8. To find examples of bravery and courage
9. To sympathize with the main character's plight
10. To describe the novel's mood or atmosphere

Specific Objectives

1. To distinguish among the different voices and explore how the author creates her narrative by interweaving first-person narrators
2. To analyze the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and link it to related events of the 1920s, including the Leopold/Loeb trial
3. To see how hatred can infiltrate anywhere, even Vermont, a state known for its tolerance and free thinking
4. To compare and contrast the characters of Leanora and Esther
5. To analyze why Harvey, Merlin, and Johnny are drawn to the Klan and prejudice while Viola, Sara, and Reynard are not
6. To probe the relationship between Esther and Sara Chickering
7. To understand what Iris Weaver symbolizes
8. To trace the plot structure
9. To consider the lessons the book teaches about ways to fight intolerance and bigotry
10. To understand why the author wrote the novel in poetry rather than in prose

Literary Terms and Applications

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

free verse poetry that does not have regular beat, rhyme, or line length. Walt Whitman's poetry is the best-known example of free verse. Poetry by its nature is compressed language. Karen Hesse uses free verse in *Witness* to force readers to infer what the poetry has left unsaid and to complete the narrative. As a result, readers become part of the narrative and explore how they would react in the situation.

setting the time and place where the events of a literary work take place. The setting of *Witness* is directly stated on the front page to Act One: Vermont, 1924. The setting is tremendously important to the novel, intensifying the horror of the situation. If the Klan can infiltrate a small Vermont town in a state known for tolerance and independence, then hatred has no boundaries.

point of view the position from which a story is told. In *Witness*, Hesse uses the first-person point of view to give the events a personal and immediate slant. Each of the narrators tells his or her own story, using individual speech patterns. This creates eleven distinct voices. For example, Esther adds extra words, inverts syntax, and uses words in unusual ways. She says, "and we had comings back with the rattle-empty wagon,/and five jingle nickels." A conventional sentence would read, "We came back in the empty rattling wagon, the five nickels we had earned jingling in our pockets."

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Avi, *Nothing but the Truth*
Ann R. Blakeslee, *Summer Battles*
Caroline Cooney, *Burning Up*
William Hooks, *Circle of Fire*
Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Todd Strasser, *Give a Boy a Gun*
Todd Strausser, *The Wave*
Virginia Euwer Wolff, *Bat 6*
Linda Jacobs Altman, *The Decade that Roared*

Nonfiction

Janis Cohn, *The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate*
Fred J. Cook, *The Ku Klux Klan: America's Recurring Nightmare*
Laura D'Angelo, *Hate Crimes*
Robert Ingalls, *Hoods: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan*

Audio Books

Good Conversation: A Talk with Karen Hesse
(Tim Podell Productions)
Witness (Listening Library, 2001)

DVDs, Videos

20th Century with Mike Wallace- Ku Klux Klan (1999)
Ku Klux Klan (1980)
Ku Klux Klan - Secret History (2001)

Internet

Southern Poverty Law Center
www.splcenter.org
Anti-Defamation League
www.adl.org
Facing History and Ourselves
www.facinghistory.org

Themes and Motifs

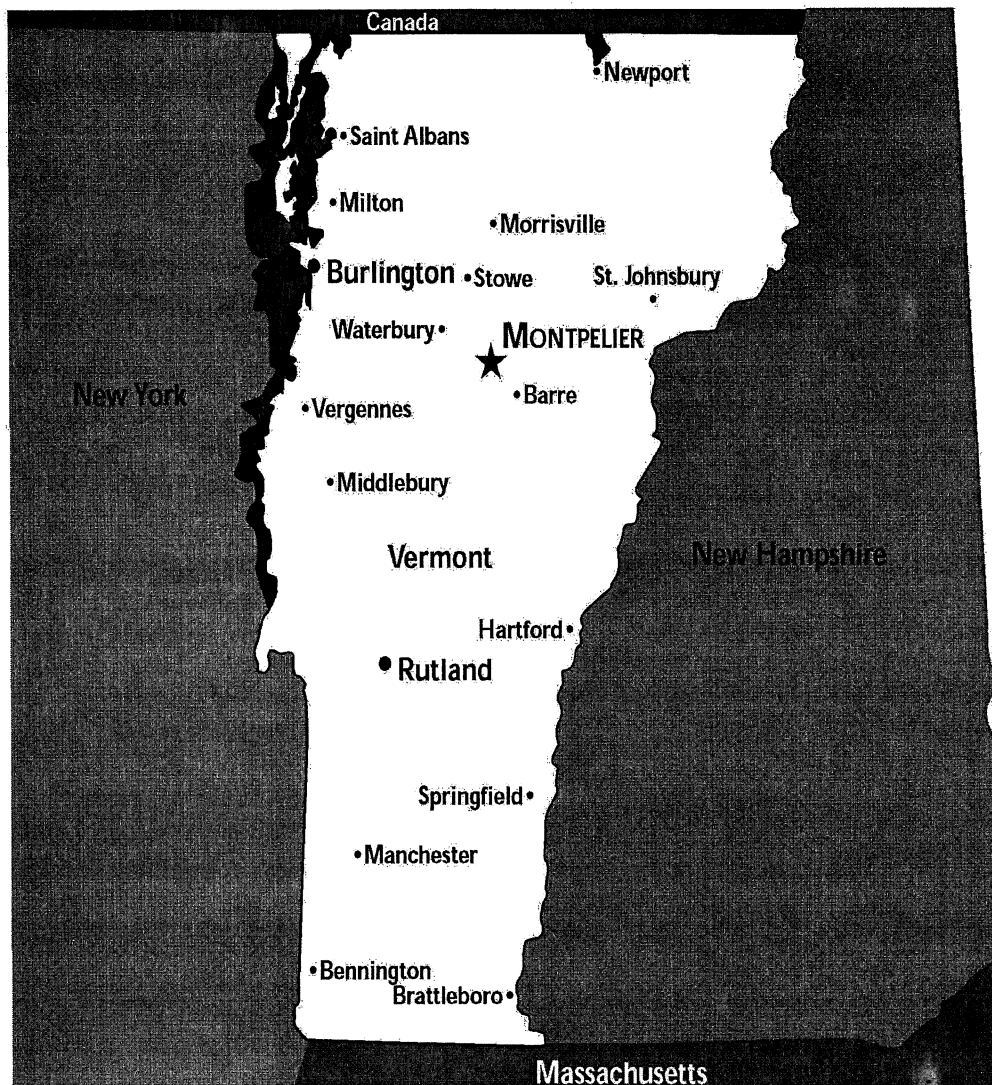
A study of the central issues and situations in Karen Hesse's *Witness* should include these aspects:

Themes

- prejudice
- hatred
- family love
- fear
- courage
- life in the 1920s
- peer pressure
- friendship
- poetry
- death

Motifs

- combating prejudice by speaking your mind and being tolerant
- showing hatred against others by acts of violence
- engendering family love by being loyal and loving
- fearing mobs and individual bullies
- displaying courage by refusing to go with the crowd
- learning about the culture and mood of the 1920s



- withstanding peer pressure versus caving into it
- risking your life to save another person's life
- being brave in terrifying situations
- reading and understanding poetry

The Importance of Setting

The setting of *Witness*, small town Vermont in the 1920s, resonates because it conveys a chilling reality: hatred and bigotry can infiltrate even the most remote and independent American states. Readers quickly realize that if notoriously flinty and self-governing Vermont residents can become part of the Ku Klux Klan, no one is safe. The town turns

against its own, ganging up against the weakest – children and minorities—and spilling prejudice across a wide swath.

Only a few sane voices and cooler heads prevail, but nonetheless, Ira Hirsh is shot and injured and his six-year-old daughter Esther narrowly avoids the same fate – or worse. The novel would not have had the same impact if the setting had been a large and cosmopolitan city such as New York, Boston, or Los Angeles.

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. i don't know how miss harvey/talked me into dancing in *the fountain of youth*/i don't know how she knew i danced at all. (Act One, p. 1)
(From the very first lines, readers are aware that this novel has an unconventional form. Although *Witness* is a narrative, events are recounted in free-verse poetry rather than in prose. The poetry is stripped down to its bare essentials to tell an emotional story of small town folks struggling against hatred and prejudice.)
2. only esther would go lugging out the company best/for a colored girl. (Act One, p. 11)
(Esther, the six-year-old Jewish girl, gives Sara Chickering's best quilt to Leanora, the twelve-year-old black girl. Esther's action shows her innate goodness and innocence and that she does not see that Leanora should be treated differently because of her race.)
3. i may work as hard as my mother/but i'm a drudge to no one. (Act One, p. 30)
(Sara has never married because she refuses to be a slave to her husband and children as her mother was. Her story summarizes how many women began feeling about asserting their rights in the 1920s.)
4. i marched home in a straight line,/with my back tall. (Act Two, p. 41)
(Aged Mr. Field tells Leanora about the brave black regiment in the Civil War. His story makes her feel great pride in her heritage. His belief in racial equality counterbalances the hatred of the Ku Klux Klan.)
5. leanora sutter/snatched esther from the path of the maine central locomotive (Act Three, p. 73)
(Leanora's brave act not only saves Esther's life but also accelerates the Klan's hatred of both families. It culminates in the attempt made on Ira Hirsh's life.)
6. until the laughter turns on us and we are wringing grief. (Act Four, p. 126)
(Leanora Sutter and her father discuss the Klan attacking blacks, Catholics, and Jews. The Klan's hatred of just about everyone sparks the Sutters' laughter over the Klan "giving white folks a bad name." Their hilarity dissolves in tears as they realize the depth and extent of the hatred directed at them.)
7. it was merlin van tornhout wrote those letters (Act Four, p. 127)
(Merlin is a study in contradictions: on one hand, he writes hate letters; on the other, he is incapable of poisoning Sutter's Well. His conflicting impulses echo those that many in the town—and in America—feel when they suspect that their way of life is at risk.)
8. i can tell God that I saw johnny reeves/that night daddy did get a bullet through him (Act Five, p. 141)
(As the plot builds to its climax, readers learn that Johnny, not Melvin, shot Ira Hirsh. As a result, we see both characters for what they are: Johnny as vicious; Melvin as confused.)
9. to those who swear our young are on the road to perdition/take comfort in this--/every generation/has felt somewhat the same/for two or three thousand years/and still the world goes on. (Act Five, p. 154)
(Fitzgerald Flitt, the doctor, states the book's theme: hatred erupts, but the world functions because good people speak up.)
10. found a young buck trapped/between cakes of ice. (Act Five, p. 158)
(The men pull the buck to safety, it jumps back into the hole, and the men save it again. The buck symbolizes the town, pulled from the brink of death by the actions of a few good people.)

Comprehension Study

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

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the story take place?
(*Witness is set in a small Vermont town in 1924.*)
2. How many narrators does this story have? How would this story be different if told in only one voice?
(*The story has eleven different first-person narrators, ranging from a six-year-old girl to men in their 60s. If told through the eyes of only one narrator, the story would be much more limited. Readers would not be able to weigh each character's actions against their own understanding of events, as they can do as a result of Hesse's interweaving of different voices.*)
3. What is the Ku Klux Klan's goal?
(*The Klan wants to preserve America's "purity" by getting rid of anyone they judge as a threat: immigrants and foreigners, blacks, Jews, and Catholics.*)
4. Contrast Harvey and Violet Pettibone's attitude toward the Klan. How are they different?
(*Harvey is drawn to the Klan while Violet is repulsed by it. Harvey tries to justify his attraction by saying that the Klan is good for business. Violet has no such illusion about the Klan's effect on decent people.*)
5. Who shoots Ira Hirsh, wounding him but not killing him?
(*Johnny Reeves, the thirty-six year old clergyman, shoots Ira.*)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why do some people resist the Klan and others eagerly join?
(*Some people, like Melvin van Tornhout, are drawn by peer pressure; others, like Harvey Pettibone, want to bolster their weak self-esteem by being part of something larger. Still others are twisted and warped, filled with hatred, such as Johnny Reeves.*)

7. Why is the setting so important in *Witness*?
(*The setting shows that hatred can infiltrate even seemingly "safe" places like isolated Vermont towns. We like to think that hatred, violence, and murder are restricted to big cities such as Chicago, shown by the random hate killing in the Leopold/Loeb case. Witness shows that discrimination and hate know no boundaries.*)
8. Merlin van Tornhout picks up a Klansman who mugs him and takes his car. What does this incident symbolize?
(*The hitchhiking Klansman mugs Merlin as the entire Klan organization has mugged the country by spewing hate, stealing innocence, and shattering lives. It symbolizes that all Klansmen are trash because of their beliefs and actions, whether they hold respected positions in society or not.*)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Did you like the form of this novel? Why or why not?
(*Answers will vary, depending on students' feelings about poetry. Some will find the poetry easy to read, while others are likely to have difficulty distinguishing among the different voices and so find the book very challenging.*)
10. Who or what are the "witnesses" in this story?
(*Possible responses: People who understand what is happening but are unable to take action because of their race (such as Leanora Sutter and her father), age (Mr. Field), or gender (Violet Pettibone.) The readers are the ultimate witnesses, of course, because they see everything but cannot stop the hatred and prejudice described in the novel – only in their own lives*)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Write a free verse poem that describes what happens to the characters ten years in the future.
12. Argue that the Klan and other hate groups should or should not be allowed the right of free speech.

Across The Curriculum

Art/Music

1. John Philip Sousa visits the small Vermont town. Play a CD of a famous Sousa march to the class. Report on his life and musical accomplishments. Why is he famous?
2. Create a three-dimensional diorama of the town. Label each part of the display with an appropriate quote from the novel.
3. Make a collage of newspaper headlines for the time period covered in the novel. Be sure the headlines cover key events in the world as well as in America during that time.

Speech

1. Leanora tells Melvin that Johnny Reeves jumped from the top of the arch bridge. Melvin looks like he had seen a ghost. Is Johnny really dead? In a roundtable discussion, decide what really happens at the end of the novel.
2. Rewrite the Headnote, the quote from Carl Sandburg's poem, in your own words. Then explain in a speech what the Headnote adds to your understanding of the novel.
3. Research the Volstead Act, the 18th Amendment, and explain why it was passed in 1920 and was repealed in 1933 with the 21st Amendment. Then debate with some classmates whether such legislation could work today to ban other harmful substances.
4. Working with a group of classmates, perform *Witness* as a Reader's Theater.

Language Arts

1. In her Newbery acceptance speech, Hesse remarked, "I was once told that writing historical fiction was a bad idea. No market for it. I didn't listen. I love research, love dipping into another time and place, and asking questions." Explain what information you would put in a time capsule so people in the future could report on your era. Include at least 10 items.
2. Hesse believes that books can change a person's life, because John Hersey's *Hiroshima* changed her life. Choose a book that changed your life and explain the effect that it had.

3. Rewrite one of the poems in prose, decide which version you like better and why, and justify your choice with specific reasons and examples.
4. Choose any one of the characters. Writing as the character, make a journal entry in which you explain and justify your actions.

History/Social Studies

1. Explain what happened in the Leopold/Loeb case and analyze why Hesse included mention of this case in the novel. Describe how this case changed the law.
2. Explore the status of the Ku Klux Klan in America today. How many members do they acknowledge? In which states—if any—are they most active?
3. Report on President Coolidge, whose election into office is described at the end of the novel. Assess his presidency by describing his main accomplishments and shortcomings.
4. Locate Vermont on a map and explain its history and topography.
5. Imagine that you are Iris Weaver. Make a map showing the route that you take to transport liquor from Canada to Vermont illegally.

Science And Math

1. Create a grocery list that a family of four might buy from the Pettibones' grocery store. Calculate how much their food would cost, based on current prices.
2. Find out how much time the average woman spent on household chores in the 1920s and how much time the average woman spends on chores today. Show your results in a graph and explain what accounts for the difference in time spent.
3. Dancing is great fun as well as being great exercise! Learn and perform some of the dances popular in the 1920s, such as the Charleston, Lindy Hop, St. Louis Shag, Peabody, and the Balboa.
4. Make a chart showing the average monthly temperature and precipitation in Vermont.

Alternate Assessment

1. Explain ways in which people can overcome prejudice and learn to live together in harmony.
2. Stage a news conference in which the governor of Vermont in 1924 describes the rise and fall of the Klan in the state.
3. Compose a scene in which Esther visits Sara Chickering 20 years later, when Esther is all grown up.
4. Write a critical review of the novel for the school newspaper.

Vocabulary

Complete the crossword puzzle with the following words from *Witness*.

Word Bank

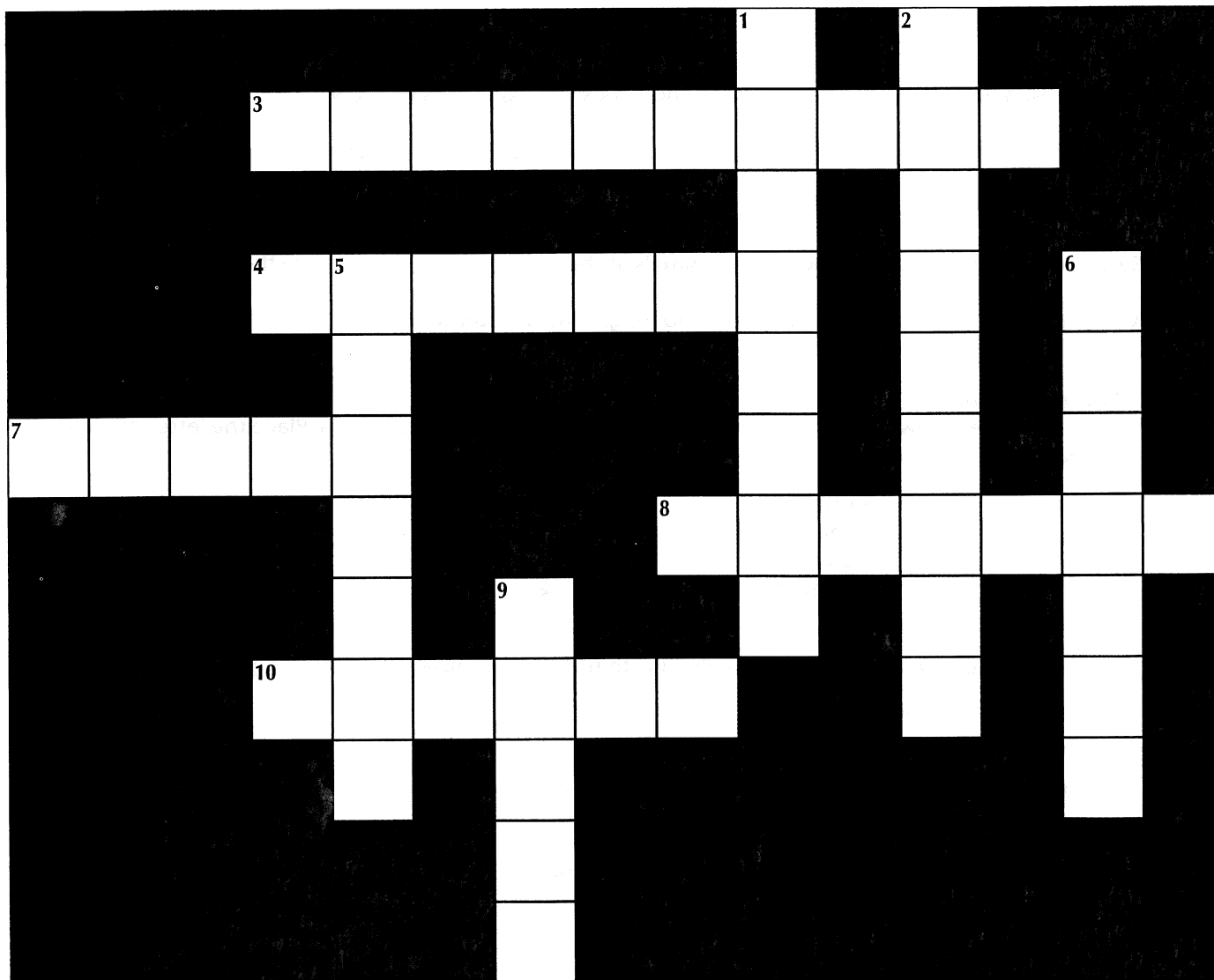
broth	flapper	lynched	scorched	spectacles
deceptive	hearth	reign	scrawny	recital

Across

- 3. eyeglasses
- 4. stylish young lady in the 1920s
- 7. rule
- 8. performance
- 10. fireplace

Down

- 1. burned
- 2. tricky
- 5. hanged
- 6. very thin
- 9. thin soup



Comprehension Test A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

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

1. The novel opens in a small, isolated town in the state of _____ in 1924.
2. Different speakers explain what happens when the organization called the _____ tries to establish a power base in the town.
3. In the _____ case, two wealthy young men murdered a little boy for a thrill of it.
4. Mr. Field tells Leanora about the heroic black soldiers who fought in the _____ War.
5. The racism intensifies when Johnny and his fellow Klansman Merlin burn a huge _____.
6. They throw a hate _____ and a rock through Sara's window, too.
7. They threaten to _____ Ira Hirsh if he doesn't move out of Sara's home.
8. Iris Weaver is caught transporting illegal _____ from Canada to Vermont.
9. Sara takes Esther to see the clowns and animals at the _____, to the child's delight.
10. Merlin picks up a hitchhiking Klansman, who mugs him and steals his _____.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| A. Ira Hirsh | F. Reynard Alexander |
| B. Esther Hirsh | G. Johnny Reeves |
| C. Violet Pettibone | H. Merlin Van Tornhout |
| D. Harvey Pettibone | I. Sara Chickering |
| E. Iris Weaver | J. Percelle Johnson |

- _____ 1. The shopkeeper who becomes involved with the Klan because he claims it is good for business
- _____ 2. The farmer who takes Esther and her father in
- _____ 3. The clergyman who eagerly embraces the Klan
- _____ 4. The restaurant owner who represents the "new" liberated woman
- _____ 5. The kindly shoe salesman
- _____ 6. The town constable, the chief law enforcement agent
- _____ 7. The man who runs away from town when he is unable to poison Sutter's Well
- _____ 8. The six-year old girl who almost dies on the train tracks
- _____ 9. The newspaper editor who resists the Klan and gives Merlin a job
- _____ 10. The woman who donates all her husband's records to an old-age home

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

- _____ 1. Reynard Alexander bails Merlin out of jail and gives him a job with the newspaper.
- _____ 2. Merlin picks up a hitchhiking Klansman, who mugs him.
- _____ 3. Esther and her father do not attend synagogue for the Jewish high holy days.
- _____ 4. Leanora Sutter does not enjoy her time helping Mr. Field, because he is a cranky old man.
- _____ 5. Leanora Sutter and her father are the only African-Americans in all of Vermont in the 1920s.
- _____ 6. Dressed in his Klan robes, Harvey Pettibone raids a hotel and smashes the liquor bottles.
- _____ 7. Harvey gives Merlin rat poison to use to poison Sutter's Well.
- _____ 8. A Klansman kills Ira Hirsh and wounds his daughter.
- _____ 9. All of Harvey's records and his phonograph, his most beloved possessions, are donated to the Winslow Home for the Aged.
- _____ 10. Merlin jumps from the iron bridge, killing himself, but his body is never found.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Argue that the government should or should not outlaw hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.
2. Analyze why some people are drawn to hate groups such as the Klan but others are repelled by them. Use specific characters from the book to make your point.
3. Describe what the buck at the end of the book represents. The buck falls into the water twice and both times the men rescue it until the animal finally flees to safety.
4. Explain why Harvey Pettibone feels so good when he breaks the glass in the hotel that the Klansmen raid, on the excuse that they are serving liquor.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: True/False (20 points)

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

- _____ 1. Reynard Alexander gives Merlin keys to the newspaper building. After Merlin runs away, he mails the keys back to Reynard.
- _____ 2. Merlin willingly gives his car to a hitchhiking Klansman because the man needs the car more than Merlin does.
- _____ 3. Constable Percelle Johnson has to protect 200 black men who have moved to the state to work on a new dam.
- _____ 4. The Klan threaten Reynard Alexander because they do not like what he is writing in the newspaper.
- _____ 5. Merlin poisons Sutter's Well, using rat poison.
- _____ 6. Iris tells everyone that she saw Merlin on the road to Plattsburg.
- _____ 7. Johnny Reeves commits suicide, jumping from the steel bridge, but his body is never found.
- _____ 8. The country elects Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the new president in 1924.
- _____ 9. The Klan's influence fades away because the Vermont government rejects their petition to do business in the state.
- _____ 10. Harvey and Viola Pettibone get divorced at the end of the novel.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

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

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| _____ 1. The young woman who owns a restaurant | A. Percelle Johnson |
| _____ 2. A twelve-year-old black girl | B. Sara Chickering |
| _____ 3. A six-year-old white girl | C. Iris Weaver |
| _____ 4. A shopkeeper against the Klan | D. Mary |
| _____ 5. Merlin's girlfriend | E. Merlin van Tornhout |
| _____ 6. The town constable, a law enforcer | F. Ira Hirsh |
| _____ 7. A shoe salesman | G. Leanora Sutter |
| _____ 8. The town doctor | H. Violet Pettibone |
| _____ 9. The farmer who takes in the Hirsh family | I. Fitzgerald Flitt |
| _____ 10. The young man people think shot the Hirshes | J. Esther Hirsh |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each statement below with a reason or explanation.

1. Ira Hirsh moves to Vermont to
2. The Ku Klux Klan is able to get a foothold in the small Vermont town because
3. Leopold and Loeb killed little Bobby Franks because
4. Sara admires Ira Hirsh because
5. Sara Chickering never married because
6. Merlin hesitates to marry his girlfriend because
7. Ira offers to move out of Sara's house because
8. Iris Weaver is not arrested for illegally transporting liquor because
9. Esther is very upset at the fair because
10. Viola gives all of Harvey's records and his phonograph, his most beloved possessions, to the Winslow Home for the Aged to

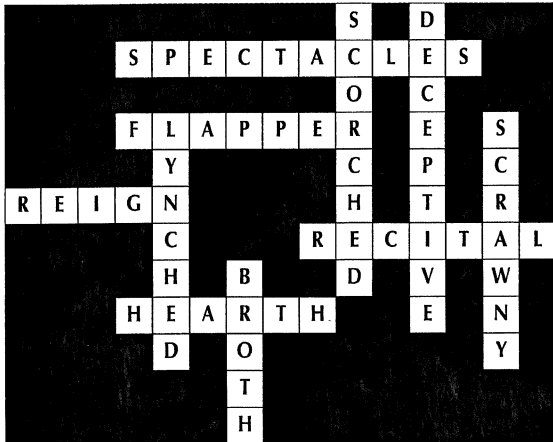
Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Karen Hesse said: "Often, our lives are so crowded, we need to hold to what is essential and weed out what is not." Explain what "essential" elements the author highlights in *Witness*.
2. Analyze what the title means and tell why it fits the novel's theme.
3. Describe the novel's setting and explain its importance to the story.
4. Explain why the author decided to write this novel as a free-verse poem rather than in prose.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY



COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Vermont | 6. letter |
| 2. Ku Klux Klan | 7. tar and feather |
| 3. Leopold and Loeb | 8. liquor |
| 4. Civil | 9. circus |
| 5. cross | 10. car |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

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

Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: True/False (20 points)

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

Part II: Matching (20 points)

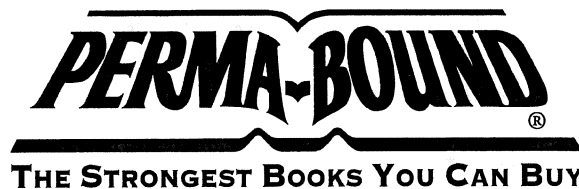
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A |
| 2. G | 7. F |
| 3. J | 8. I |
| 4. H | 9. B |
| 5. D | 10. E |

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

1. make a new life after the death of his wife
2. some racist people eagerly join the Klan
3. they wanted a thrill
4. he is gentle, kind, and generous
5. she wants to remain independent and not be a slave to her family
6. he is afraid she will hurt his standing because she bought shoes from Ira Hirsh, who is Jewish
7. he wants to protect her from being harmed by the Klan
8. the man in the car with her takes the blame for the bootlegging
9. one of the "games" involves people taking shots at a black person's head
10. make amends for his involvement with the Klan

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



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