

Wringer

by Jerry Spinelli

Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Kathy Sammis

A Perma-Bound Production

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SYNOPSIS

A simulated news clipping describes the town of Waymer's annual Pigeon Day, climax of the week-long Family Fest festival. Sharpshooters pay a fee to shoot at groups of pigeons released from boxes; a total of 5,000 pigeons are targets over the course of the day. Wounded birds are retrieved by wringer boys, who break the birds' necks. The high scorer wins the coveted Sharpshooter's trophy, and funds raised go to maintain the community's 40-acre park.

Chap. 1: Palmer LaRue does not want to be a wringer. This strong certainty has been with Palmer since early childhood, filling him with ever-present dread. But inevitably Palmer moves ever closer to his tenth birthday, after which he, along with the town's other ten-year-old boys, will become a wringer at that summer's Family Fest.

Chap. 2: On his ninth birthday, Palmer is thrilled when neighborhood tough-kid Beans and his sidekicks Mutto and Henry ("hoodlums," according to Palmer's mother) attend his birthday party and is even more thrilled when the gang gives him his own nickname: Snots. At last, Palmer is one of the guys.

Chap. 3: Outside after the party, Beans harasses Palmer's across-the-street neighbor, Dorothy Gruzik, by leaving sewer muck on her front steps. Beans and the guys cannot stand Dorothy and call her Fishface. Palmer does not understand why they act this way, but he's delighted to be running with the gang.

Chap. 4: The guys head over to the community park, a place Palmer avoids because of its association with Pigeon Day. On the soccer field, where the shoot is held, Henry pretends to be a wounded pigeon, and Beans and Mutto simulate breaking his neck. Palmer watches, frozen.

Chap. 5: At the playground, the boys run into Farquar, the legendary wringer and most feared kid in town. To mark the ninth birthday, Farquar gives Palmer the traditional Treatment—nine incredibly painful knuckle shots to his upper arm. Palmer feels privileged to undergo this ultimate test, receive this ultimate honor, which he endures stoically.

Chap. 6: Palmer's mother thinks The Treatment is dreadful, but Palmer's father calmly recalls that he got knuckled often when he was growing up. As a special birthday gift, Mr. LaRue passes on to Palmer the toy soldiers that once belonged to the boy's great-grandfather. At day's end, Palmer basks in new feelings of "excitement and pride and belonging" but then suddenly bursts into tears as the thought hits him, *You have run out of birthdays.*

Chap. 7: The livid bruise on Palmer's arm earns him great respect from the neighborhood kids—except from Dorothy, who's unimpressed. She is also annoyed that Palmer did not invite her to his birthday party. Meanwhile, Palmer goes along with the gang when they taunt and harass Dorothy, who completely ignores her tormentors. Then the first week of August arrives, Family Fest time.

Chap. 8: Palmer remembers his first Pigeon Day, when he was four years old. A wringer broke a pigeon's neck right in front of him, and he began to notice a gray sour smell in the air. All the next year, little Palmer tried to figure out why people would want to kill pigeons, "to put them out of their misery," as his mother said. Mr. LaRue told Palmer that he had been a wringer himself, and when Palmer asked, "Will I be a wringer too?" his father had answered, "Sure thing, big guy."

Chap. 9: The following year, Palmer attended Pigeon Day with Dorothy Gruzik and her family. Dorothy, a year younger than Palmer, was horrified when he told her that the pigeons would be shot; she ran off.

Chap. 10: The next year, Palmer spent Pigeon Day with Dorothy at the playground, not wanting to watch the pigeon shoot, but Arthur Dodds—who later became Beans—did manage to catch and kill a wounded pigeon, even though he was only five years old. When he was eight years old, Palmer visited the city with his family and was amazed to see how attractive and tame the city pigeons were. Back home, Palmer noticed for the first time that the golden pigeon statue in the den is inscribed "Sharpshooter Award/Pigeon Day/1989."

Chaps 11-12: Back in the present, Palmer tries to enjoy the Family Fest, but worries about having to attend Pigeon Day with his new buddies; Beans and Mutto are very eager to become wringers next year. On Pigeon Day, Palmer feigns illness and stays shut up in his room.

Chaps. 13-14: Following a blizzard in early January, Palmer wakes up to the sound of tapping. He's horrified to discover that a pigeon is pecking at his bedroom window. Ignoring the bird, Palmer rushes off to school, joining his buddies on the way in pelting Dorothy with a barrage of snowballs. Palmer reflects that there's no room in his life for friendship with Dorothy any more, now that he's with the guys.

Chaps. 15-16: The pigeon taps on Palmer's window again the next morning. In spite of himself, Palmer feeds the bird some cereal. That evening, the pigeon taps again, and Palmer lets the bird into his bedroom. The pigeon examines everything in the room, including Palmer, and then settles down to roost in the closet.

Chaps. 17-19: Palmer and the bird settle into a routine. The pigeon becomes Palmer's "alarm clock," waking the boy each morning with a peck on the earlobe, which earns the bird a name: Nipper. Each morning, Palmer lets Nipper out and leaves cereal on the porch roof by his window. Each day near dusk, Palmer lets Nipper back in, they play, and then Nipper roosts for the night in the closet. Palmer gets his mother to agree not to come into his room without knocking, and he diverts the guys each time Beans suggests that they go to Palmer's house.

Chap. 20: At Beans's house one afternoon, Palmer meets Beans's super-mean yellow cat, Panther, a skilled hunter. Beans extracts one of Panther's kills, a muskrat, from the freezer and takes it to the Gruziks' house, where he nails it to the door and punches the doorbell. Mrs. Gruzik's scream chills Palmer.

Chap. 21: Mutto insists he sees a pigeon flying over Palmer's house, but Palmer insists that is ridiculous. Actually, Nipper does circle the house several times each morning before leaving, a pigeon's way of imprinting the place it must return to.

Chap. 22: Beans steps up the harassment of Dorothy on the walk to and from school, infuriated at Dorothy's lack of response. Finally, though, Dorothy does break down—by walking over to Palmer and asking, "Why are you doing this to me?" A few days later, Palmer can no longer bear keeping Nipper's existence a secret from everybody. He goes across the street and tells Dorothy, "I have a pigeon."

Chap. 23: On his tenth birthday, Beans rushes off to find Farquar and get The Treatment, which makes him officially ten years old. Now, he crows, "I'm a wringer!"

Chap. 24: Dorothy comes over often after school to play with Palmer and Nipper and soon becomes Palmer's confidant. He reveals to Dorothy his deep aversion to becoming a wringer. Her solution is simple: "Then don't." Palmer shrieks that he cannot "be the only boy in the history of the town who was ever not a wringer!" Furthermore, he adds, Beans would force him to go to the park on Pigeon Day.

Chap. 25: On a lovely spring day, disaster strikes. While Palmer is walking down the street with his buddies, Nipper lands on his head. "The bird is yours," Beans states flatly. Palmer wildly denies this and screams, "Whack 'em! I hate pigeons! I'm gonna be the best wringer there ever was!"

Chaps. 26-27: For the next month, Palmer goes to great lengths to avoid Nipper on the way home from school, misbehaving daily so he is kept after school until Nipper has already returned to the bedroom window. At last summer vacation starts.

Chap. 28: Beans, Mutto, and Henry drag Palmer off with them to the park's soccer field, where a man in a pink baseball cap—the wringmaster—teaches a mob of ten-year-old boys how to carry out their duties as wringers. Beans and Mutto are enthusiastic; Henry and Palmer are not.

Chap. 29: Palmer is increasingly fearful of his "buddies," who still think he might have a pigeon; if they ever found Nipper, they'd be sure to kill him. Disturbingly, Mrs. LaRue mentions that she has seen a yellow cat hanging around, once outside and once in the house itself.

Chap. 30: Early in July, Palmer's dreaded tenth birthday arrives. At the party, the guys are highly impressed with Mr. LaRue's Sharpshooter Award. But when Beans remarks that Mr. LaRue must hate pigeons even more than he himself does, Palmer's father calmly responds, "No, I don't hate pigeons. Never did." And when Beans points out that Palmer is a wringer

now, just like his father, Mr. LaRue answers, "Palmer decides for himself. It's up to him." This year, Palmer feels quite different about the soon-to-be applied Treatment: "No pride, no honor awaited him. Only pain and uselessness." That evening, Palmer finds a warning finger-lettered on his birthday cake's icing: "tonight."

Chap. 31: Palmer realizes the warning came from Henry and that Beans and Mutto are planning to sneak into his bedroom that night, searching for the pigeon. Palmer thwarts the plan by hiding downstairs behind the sofa with Nipper all night.

Chaps. 32-33: The next day, Beans and the guys take Palmer to Farquar for The Treatment. Palmer finally rebels, screaming "No Treatment! No wringer! No Snots!" He runs off, chased by his furious former friends. When Palmer finally gets home, he finds Nipper outside the bedroom window and the yellow cat on his bed, watching the bird.

Chap. 34: Sadly, Palmer and Dorothy realize they must take Nipper away in order to save him from Beans and his cronies. They bicycle far out of town, where Palmer releases Nipper in the woods by a meadow. When they get home, Nipper is waiting for them.

Chap. 35: Palmer's mother confesses that she and Palmer's father have known all along that Palmer has a pet pigeon. They're not mad, and Dad does not shoot pigeons any more, either. Palmer makes his own confession, revealing his dread at becoming a wringer. A few days later, Dorothy and her parents go on a seashore vacation; Dorothy takes Nipper along and releases him, far from Waymer.

Chaps. 36-37: Beans and Mutto continue to harass Palmer until he finally convinces them that Nipper is gone. Palmer listlessly tumbles through July.

Chap. 38: Family Fest begins in early August, and the crates of pigeons arrive in Waymer. At home, the golden pigeon statue is gone from the mantel.

Chap. 39: Palmer surprises himself by attending the Pigeon Day shoot, but as a spectator, not as a wringer. It is a carefully described scene, grim and gruesome to the novel's readers but festive and fun for the fictional crowd of watchers. Dorothy joins Palmer for a while, and he presses her to describe exactly how and where she released Nipper. He is horrified when she says she released the bird at the city's railroad yards—where pigeons are trapped and brought to this shoot.

Chap. 40: In a tense, suspenseful climax, Palmer keeps watching the shoot, wondering as each bird is released and shot if it is Nipper, but he cannot tell, because most of the pigeons look just like his pet. Then one bird, as occasionally happens, manages to fly free without being shot. But instead of flying away, it circles the field again and again and then swoops straight down to land on Palmer's head. It is Nipper! But immediately Beans races over, grabs the bird, and runs back, shaking the bird in the shooter's face and screaming, "It's yours! It came back! Kill! Kill!" As the shooter prepares to do just that, Palmer runs across the field and plunges facefirst into the bloody feathers, sliding to Nipper and curling himself around his little friend. Palmer rises, feeling incredibly light and peaceful, and shows the crowd his rescued pet, then walks away from the field. As he leaves, a child's hand touches Nipper's wing, stroking it, and a child's voice asks, "Can I have one too, Daddy?"

TIME LINE

Palmer, age 4 Attends first Pigeon Day, witnesses pigeon-

	wringing up close.
Palmer, age 5	Declines to attend Pigeon Day, knows he does not want to become a wringer.
Palmer, age 8	Visits city, is impressed by urban pigeons.
Palmer, age 9	On birthday in July, becomes part of Beans's gang, gets The Treatment.
early January	Nipper appears and becomes part of Palmer's life.
April	Palmer tells Dorothy about Nipper.
early May	Nipper lands on Palmer's head in front of Beans, Mutto, and Henry.
early July	Palmer's tenth birthday. Palmer refuses The Treatment, breaks with Beans's gang. Dorothy releases Nipper in the city.
August 2	Family Fest begins.
August 7	Pigeon Day; Palmer saves Nipper.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jerry Spinelli is a popular author of books for children and young adults, depicting the travails of the preteen and adolescent years with humor, insight, and accuracy. He was born in 1941 and grew up in Norristown, Pennsylvania. His early ambition was to become a major league baseball player, but then he was inspired to become a writer after the local newspaper published his poem about his high school football team's victory. Spinelli graduated from Gettysburg College in 1963 and earned his master's from Johns Hopkins University in 1964. He worked as an editor at Chilton Company, a technical publisher, from 1966 until 1989. In his earlier years at Chilton, Spinelli spent lunch hours and evenings writing; he turned out four adult novels that found no publishers. Spinelli changed his writing approach after his 1977 marriage to writer Eileen Mesi, whose five children from a previous marriage provided him with inspiration and material. A written description of an incident at home evolved into Spinelli's first published book, *Space Station Seventh Grade*, in which newly adolescent Jason humorously describes the pitfalls of this perilous year. Other teen novels followed, drawing in readers with their humor and authentic voice while at the same time often dealing with serious themes of racism, gender bias, sex, and peer pressure. Spinelli published his best-known and most popular book, the Newbery Medal-winning *Maniac Magee*, in 1990. This was Spinelli's first book for readers in the middle grades, an audience he has continued to address with novels like *Fourth Grade Rats*, the Tooter Pepperday books, the *School Daze* series, *Crash*, and *Wringer*. Spinelli continues to live and work in Pennsylvania. In 1998 he published memoirs of his childhood, another source of material for his novels, in *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*. Asked by his young audience where he gets his material ("all that stuff"), Spinelli responded (as related in his Newbery acceptance speech), "You. You're where I get all that stuff. You're the funny ones. You're the fascinating ones. You're the elusive and inspiring and promising and heroic and maddening ones."

CRITICS' CORNER

Critics admire Spinelli for his accurate and humorous portrayal of children and teens struggling to cope with life's recurring child-and-teen problems. Some adults disapprove of his characters' sometimes crude and ribald dialogue, but young readers find Spinelli's characters authentic and the situations they must deal with familiar. Critics highly praised *Wringer*, which was a 1998 Newbery Honor Book. *Booklist* wrote, "The combination of the tender, sometimes comic pet story with the bloody public festival

will move kids to think about a lot of issues." *Horn Book* said, "As in *Maniac Magee*, Spinelli invests a realistic story with the intensity of a fable." *Publishers Weekly* noted, "Tender scenes contrast with barbaric images in this spellbinding story about rites of passage....[Spinelli's] eloquently wrought narrative alternates between allegory and realism, tracing Palmer's emotionally arduous journey towards manhood." *School Library Journal* concluded, "Spinelli's characters are memorable, convincing, and both endearing and villainous; and they are involved in a plot that, from the first page, is riveting. The story is told in language simple enough for young readers, yet elegant enough for adults....A wide audience will enjoy this thought-provoking book."

OTHER WORKS BY JERRY SPINELLI

- The Bathwater Gang* (1990)
The Bathwater Gang Gets Down to Business (1992)
Blue Ribbon Blues: A Tooter Tale (1998)
Crash (1996)
Do the Funky Pickle (*School Daze* series) (1992)
Dump Days (1988)
Fourth Grade Rats (1991)
Jason and Marceline (1986)
Knots in My Yo-Yo String: The Autobiography of a Kid (1998)
The Library Card (1997)
Maniac Magee (1990)
Night of the Whale (1985)
Picklemania (*School Daze* series) (1993)
School Daze: Report to the Principal's Office (1991)
Space Station Seventh Grade (1982)
There's a Girl in My Hammerlock (1991)
Tooter Pepperday (1995)
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Internet

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</www.eyentomorrow.com/
embracingthechild/aspinelli.htm>

"Jerry Spinelli"

<www.randomhouse.com/teachers/rc/rc_ab_jsp.html>

"Jerry Spinelli" (Educational Paperback Association)

</www.edupaperback.org/authorbios/spinell.html>

"Jerry Spinelli" (Mona Kerby's The Author Corner)

<www.carr.lib.md.us/authco/spinelli-j.htm>

"Wringer"

<www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0064405788/o
qid=959128666/sr=2-3/103-7226354-008648>

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the nature and causes of bullying behavior and discuss ways to deal with it and stop it
2. To discuss the issue of peer pressure and develop ways to resist negative peer pressure
3. To consider guidelines on what does and does not constitute harassing behavior
4. To examine the issues of mistreatment of animals and animal rights
5. To become familiar with elements of the coming-of-age novel
6. To discuss the important role pets and friends can play in a person's life
7. To develop methods of identifying false friends
8. To become familiar with typical physical and behavioral characteristics of pigeons

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To recognize why Palmer comes to have a pigeon as a pet, why this is a problem for Palmer, and the steps Palmer must take to protect his pet
2. To identify the various reactions of the people in Palmer's life to the existence of Nipper
3. To note the ways in which Beans and Mutto harass Dorothy, the techniques she uses to deal with the harassment, and Beans's reactions to Dorothy's approach
4. To observe the contrast between the fun-filled first five days of Waymer's Family Fest and the final, bloody and violent day of the Fest
5. To understand Palmer's long-standing dread of turning ten and the roots of his desperate desire not to become a wringer
6. To trace the ways in which Palmer's feelings about being "one of the guys" change in the course of the novel
7. To identify the ways in which Palmer's relationship with Nipper helps him stand up to peer pressure and the town's traditions
8. To recognize the ways in which Palmer solves the moral dilemmas he has been wrestling with

9. To note the contrasting appeals to Palmer of both Beans and Dorothy and understand why Palmer ultimately rejects Beans

10. To analyze the ways in which the author develops and sustains suspense throughout the course of the novel

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with these terms.

coming-of-age novel: a work of fiction in which the main character moves toward, into, and/or through adolescence and develops at least the beginnings of maturity. In this novel, Palmer ultimately stands up to peer pressure and mindless tradition and acts on his own deeply felt beliefs, taking a giant stride forward into maturity from childhood.

conflict: the opposition of two forces or characters in a literary work. This novel is built around Palmer's tortured interior conflict about being a wringer—Palmer feels pressured by town tradition, his perception of his father's wishes, and his buddies to be a wringer when he gets to be ten years old, but he has known with certainty since he was five years old that he wishes with all his heart not to be a wringer and that he hates pigeon-killing. The conflict becomes exterior when Palmer adopts Nipper as a pet and he then has to act in violation of town tradition in order to save his loved pigeon.

flashback: a scene inserted into a film, play, or work of fiction showing events that happened earlier, also known as **analepsis**. The flashback device allows an author to fill in background information about characters and events, explaining things that happened before the time when the work opens. In this novel, Chapters 8, 9, and 10 flash back to Palmer's first three Pigeon Days, establishing the development of his revulsion at killing pigeons and becoming a wringer when he is older.

point of view: the perspective from which a story is told. This novel is told from Palmer's point of view, using **third-person narration**. The narration reveals Palmer's feelings and thoughts; we learn about other characters' feelings and reactions through their dialogue and Palmer's observations of their actions and reactions.

suspense: expectant uncertainty about the outcome of a plot. This novel sustains a high degree of suspense throughout. Chapter 1 establishes the aura of dread that has haunted Palmer ever since he found out that the town's ten-year-olds are expected to act as wringers at the pigeon shoot. The author offers no hints or clues that Palmer will be able to avoid being a wringer, so the outcome of this conflict remains a source of anxiety for both Palmer and the readers throughout the novel. Palmer's acquisition of Nipper as a pet adds another element of suspense, as we wonder if Palmer will be able to protect Nipper from the many threats to pigeons in town, especially Beans's over-the-top hatred of pigeons and lust to kill them. The final scenes at the pigeon shoot are heart-stoppingly suspenseful, as we and Palmer anxiously wonder if Nipper will be among the birds shot and, once Nipper appears, if Palmer will be able to save him.

SETTINGS

The basic setting is the all-American town of Waymer, where Palmer and his friends live in a modest neighborhood with very small but well-tended front yards along sidewalk-lined streets. Across the street from Palmer's house is Dorothy Gruzik's house; within walking distance is the school that Palmer,

Dorothy, Beans, Mutto, and Henry all attend. Five or six blocks from Palmer's house is the downtown area, with the deli where Farquar is often found and the GreatGrocer supermarket, behind whose dumpster Palmer hides when he flees from Farquar and Beans's gang. Beans's house is a ten-minute walk from Palmer's. Not far from the boys' homes is Valentine's Hill, great for winter sledding, and Waymer's 40-acre community park, with its playground, World War I cannon, Boy Scout cabin, picnic area, and multiple sports fields—including the soccer field, which is the site of the pigeon shoot, climax of the week-long Family Fest that is held at the park in August.

Aside from naming the specific places, all these settings are quite featureless, which focuses attention on the moral dilemmas Palmer is struggling with throughout the novel's action. Palmer's bedroom is described in detail as the narration relates the comic and interesting ways in which Palmer, Dorothy, and Nipper interrelate. One scene takes place in the countryside outside Waymer, as Palmer and Dorothy bicycle as far away as they can get in half a day in order to release Nipper. In a brief flashback scene, Palmer visits the city and is very impressed with the urban pigeons, seeing the birds for the first time in a context other than at the Pigeon Day shoot.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

Fiction

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 Donald R. Gallo, *No Easy Choices: Short Stories About Teenagers Making Tough Choices*
 Jean Craighead George, *The Cry of the Crow*
 Dennis Haseley, *Getting Him*
 Shirley Jackson, *The Lottery*
 Dick King-Smith, *The Cuckoo Child*
 Farley Mowat, *Owls in the Family*
 Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *Gay-Neck: The Story of a Pigeon*
 Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *Shiloh* and sequels
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 Ann Turnbull, *Speedwell*

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Video

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Good Conversation! A Talk with Jerry Spinelli (Tim Podell Productions)
Paws, Claws, Feathers & Fins: A Kid's Video Guide to Pets (KIDVIDZ)
Student Workshop: Making Decisions, Solving Problems (Sunburst)
When Friends Mean Trouble (Sunburst)
With Wings to Fly (Farrell Film Production)

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *Wringer* should include these aspects.

Themes

- cruelty toward animals
- bullying and harassment
- violence
- peer pressure
- coming of age
- dealing with moral dilemmas
- friendship

Motifs

- pigeons and their orange eyes
- sharpshooting
- family festivals
- birthday parties
- beans
- gender roles
- sour gunsmoke smell
- nicknames
- soccer

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. Hundreds of sharpshooters in and around this rural community are cleaning their shotguns (Newspaper-clipping preface to the novel)
(Shotguns are the weapon prescribed for use at the Family

Fest's annual pigeon shoot. A shotgun is a smoothbore gun that fires small shot to kill birds and small animals. Palmer's father used to be a shooter at Pigeon Day, and he won the Sharpshooter's Award for highest score in 1989, as we learn later in the novel.)

2. But something was still there. Palmer knew what it was. It had been there all along, silent, hardly seen among the cheering crowd, a flash of black feather now and then, an orange eye, waiting. (Chap. 7, p. 37)
(This is an image of the ever-present dread within Palmer that he is so often aware of, that intrudes even into happy moments—Palmer's dread of turning ten and having to be a wringer, a killer of black-feathered, orange-eyed pigeons, at that summer's Pigeon Day shoot.)
3. "Bet you'll have a snow day." (Chap. 13, p. 69)
(For the benefit of students in southern states, a "snow day" is a day when school is canceled because snow has made automobile and schoolbus travel difficult and hazardous. Kids in snowy climates consider snow days off from school as great treats and often spend the day as Palmer and his friends do, playing outdoors in the freshly fallen snow.)
4. "What do you think is going to happen to me if people think I have a pigeon?" (Chap. 15, p. 76)
(Even though he is quite reluctant to admit it to himself, Palmer is quite drawn by the pigeon from the moment of its first appearance. But he knows everyone in town loves to shoot pigeons or watch them be shot at the Family Fest, so he is quite certain anyone in town who knew he had a pigeon at his house would consider him crazy, or a traitor to Waymer values and traditions.)
5. Eight! Who would have thought one miserable winged rat had so many colors? (Chap. 15, p. 78)
(Observing the pigeon closely, Palmer discovers that it has no less than eight different colors on its body. This confirms his earlier opinion after seeing the city pigeons—pigeons are very attractive birds. But Palmer knows that many people consider pigeons dirty, lousy creatures, spreading filth and droppings, no more desirable to have around than rats. "Miserable" recalls Palmer's belief at age four that pigeons were always in misery, which is why people were so happy to kill them at the Family Fest.)
6. Palmer opened one eye to find an orange button staring back. (Chap. 17, p. 88)
(A pigeon's eye as an orange button is a recurring image in this novel. Palmer has been haunted by the orange pigeon eye ever since he was four years old and a wringer boy killed a pigeon right in front of little Palmer, while the pigeon was looking at him with its orange eye.)
7. Palmer knew that after Farquar's ten knuckles this year, no pride, no honor awaited him. Only pain and uselessness. (Chap. 31, p. 166)
(Palmer has made giant strides toward maturity and a firm sense of self since his last birthday. Then he was immensely proud and honored to receive The Treatment from Farquar. Now he sees The Treatment as the meaningless act of cruelty that it actually is. Palmer's new view of The Treatment is a hint that he just might reject the ritual this year, when he finally encounters Farquar.)
8. Palmer's bike charged in reckless patterns only a fly could

follow: circles, figure eights, zigzags, crazy doodles. (Chap. 34, p. 188)

(Palmer has Nipper in the bike's basket, and he is trying to confuse the bird's homing instincts, so Nipper will be unable to identify a pattern that will bring him back to Waymer and Palmer's home. The tactic does not work; Nipper is waiting on the windowsill when Palmer finally gets home at day's end.)

9. The next day Palmer buried the toy soldiers in the backyard. (Chap. 37, p. 201)
(The previous day, Palmer had acted out a deadly assault with his toy soldiers against a defenseless eraser, which miraculously survived and crawled away from its attackers, until a final merciless fusillade from the machine gun and regrouped troops killed the eraser, cutting it to pieces. Palmer realizes he has acted out the slaughter of a defenseless pigeon at the Family Fest. Now he wants nothing more to do with the toy soldiers, so he banishes them from his life by burying them in the back yard.)
10. During the week Palmer's father said many things, mostly with his hands....Palmer could not remember the last time his father called him "big guy." (Chap. 38, p. 206)
(Palmer's father is expressing his support of Palmer with a variety of gentle, reassuring touches, letting Palmer know he is fully supportive of Palmer's decision to break with Beans's gang and not to be a wringer. When Palmer was an immature little child, his father would buoy him by calling him "big guy." Now that Palmer has taken giant strides into maturity by resolving the moral dilemmas posed by Nipper's existence and achieving the wringer age of ten, Palmer's dad no longer has to help Palmer feel like a "big guy," because Palmer is now in fact a big guy.)

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 1-4 (Literal Level)

1. How does Palmer come to have a pigeon as a pet? Why is this a very odd pet for anyone in Waymer to have?
(Palmer is awakened one winter morning by a pigeon tapping on his window. The next morning, the pigeon is back, and Palmer feeds it some cereal. That evening, the pigeon taps again, and Palmer lets it into his bedroom. The pigeon is very alert, examines everything in the room, including Palmer, and then settles down comfortably in the closet to roost overnight. Palmer enjoys the bird's antics, sounds, and company, so he settles into a routine of letting Nipper fly off each morning and opening the window for Nipper to come back in at the end of each day. Most people in Waymer consider pigeons as "winged rats," filthy creatures fit only to be shot on Pigeon Day, totally unfit to be pets.)
2. What steps does Palmer take to protect Nipper?
(He keeps Nipper's existence a secret from everybody except the sympathetic Dorothy. [Palmer's parents secretly are aware that Palmer has a pet pigeon, but they do not disapprove.] Palmer diverts Beans's and Mutto's attentions to harassing Dorothy and pursuing other activities whenever the boys suggest going over to Palmer's house. With the guys,

Palmer pretends to hate pigeons and be looking forward to being a wringer. He misbehaves daily at school so he'll be kept after and thus not be walking home when Nipper is flying home through the neighborhood. He wears disguises when he walks home from school so Nipper will not recognize him. Finally, realizing he cannot keep Beans and his gang at bay indefinitely, Palmer has Dorothy take Nipper far away and release him while she is on a family vacation. Finally, when Nipper becomes a target at the Family Fest pigeon shoot, Palmer races onto the killing field and shields his pigeon with his own body, saving the bird's life.)

3. What techniques do Beans and Mutto use to harass Dorothy? How does she react? When and why does the bullying stop?

(Beans and the guys cannot stand Dorothy, probably because she does not react to their teasing, so they call her Fishface, leave disgusting things like sewer muck and a dead muskrat on her doorstep, disrupt her hopscotch game, bomb Dorothy and her house with snowballs, taunt her, take her red hat, and run rings around her on the sidewalk or block the sidewalk completely so she has to walk around them. Dorothy's response is to ignore her tormentors totally; she does not even look at them. This infuriates Beans, but eventually the sport of tormenting Dorothy gets boring, since it gets no response, and by spring the gang pretty much ignores her.)

4. Describe Waymer's Family Fest.

(It is a typical summer carnival-like festival, featuring many food booths with delicacies such as cotton candy and funnel cakes, rides like a Ferris wheel and a Tilt-A-Whirl, amusement booths like the shooting gallery and Dunk-A-Kid, a House of Horrors and a Fun House, and events like a pie-eating contest. The climax of the week-long Fest is Pigeon Day, when sharpshooters pay a fee for the chance to shoot at ten to twenty pigeons as they are released from boxes. Proceeds from the shoot go to maintain the community's large park.)

Questions 5-8 (Interpretive Level)

5. Why does Palmer dread his tenth birthday?

(Traditionally, all of Waymer's ten-year-old boys act as wringers at the Pigeon Day shoot—they run onto the field and retrieve the dead and wounded pigeons after each shooter has his or her turn. Back on the sidelines, a wringer wrings the neck of each wounded pigeon, killing it. Palmer was horrified when a wringer broke the neck of a pigeon right in front of him when he was four years old. From then on, Palmer struggled unsuccessfully to understand why all those pigeons have to be shot each year. By the time of Palmer's third Pigeon Day, when he is five years old, he knows with certainty that he does not want to be a wringer, but he is also certain that community tradition and his father's own wishes will force him to become a wringer. Since all boys in town who are ten years old act as wringers at each year's Pigeon Day, Palmer has spent his childhood dreading his tenth birthday. [Note: the text erroneously has Palmer four years old at his first Pigeon Day and five years old at his third Pigeon Day two years later.]

6. Why does Palmer feel he has to keep the existence of Nipper a secret? Why does he finally let Dorothy in on this

secret?

(As far as Palmer knows, most people in Waymer hate pigeons and think they're fit only to be shot; people certainly react with great glee to the proceedings at the Pigeon Day shoot. Since his own father was once a wringer and also an award-winning shooter, Palmer thinks his father would want Nipper killed, too, so he does not let his parents know about the bird [although secretly they do know]. Palmer certainly cannot reveal Nipper's existence to Beans and Mutto, who hate pigeons and eagerly look forward to killing them as wringers; Beans even managed to kill a pigeon at Pigeon Day when he was only five years old. But the burden of keeping this wonderful secret all to himself is eventually too much for Palmer, so he chooses to share the secret with Dorothy, who he knows finds the pigeon shoot horrifying.)

7. How do Palmer's feelings about being "one of the guys" change in the course of the novel?

*(When he was younger, Palmer yearned to be accepted by Beans and his cronies, but they rejected him as too small, too young, and too strangely named. When Beans, Mutto, and Henry attend his ninth birthday party, Palmer is thrilled, and he is positively beside himself when the guys give him the ultimate sign of acceptance, his very own nickname—Snots. Palmer willingly joins in with the guys as they torment Dorothy, although he has a few pangs about this. But Palmer's feelings of excitement and pride and belonging easily subdue the pangs. Once Nipper becomes his pet, Palmer becomes increasingly uneasy about being one of the guys, because Beans and Mutto hate pigeons and cannot wait to become wringers, pigeon-killers. Once Palmer begins sharing Nipper and his anxieties about becoming a wringer with Dorothy, he finds a much truer sense of friendship and support from her than from the guy gang. Then Beans and Mutto start stalking Nipper, personally and via Beans's cat, which causes Palmer to reject membership in the gang. He sees that being "one of the guys" means accepting *The Treatment* and being a wringer, neither of which he wants.)*

8. How does his relationship with Nipper enable Palmer finally to reject peer pressure and act according to his own desires?

(His love for Nipper and his need to protect the bird force Palmer to stand up to Beans and Mutto, rejecting their desire to be wringers and kill pigeons, Nipper in particular. Telling his mother about Nipper frees Palmer also to tell her he does not want to be a wringer, a decision his parents readily accept now that they know about it.)

Questions 9-11 (Critical Level)

9. What moral dilemmas does Palmer struggle with in the course of the novel?

(He cannot understand why it is supposed to be a good thing to kill pigeons at the Family Fest each year. He wonders how his dad can be a good, kind father and yet also be a shooter on Pigeon Day. He loves being one of the guys, but he is not sure it is really fair to torment Dorothy. He is not sure if making a pigeon into a pet is acceptable. Worst of all, Palmer knows he does not want to be a wringer and kill pigeons, yet he feels he cannot break with town tradition and reject the wringer role when he reaches his tenth birthday.)

10. Compare Beans and Dorothy. What elements of each person appeal to Palmer?

(Beans is attractively gross, with stained never-brushed teeth and bean-smelling breath. He is crude, he is mean, he plays and acts out exuberantly, he is the neighborhood boss of all the younger kids. All this, except the meanness, appeal strongly to Palmer. Dorothy, on the other hand, is cool and collected; she plays on her own, not as part of an ever-present group. She ignores Beans's taunting and teasing. She is also empathetic, finds Nipper delightful, and supports Palmer in his rejection of the wringer role, all of which draw Palmer into friendship with her.)

11. How would you describe the mood in the last two chapters of the novel? How does the author create this mood?

(The mood is very suspenseful. The author describes in great detail the pigeon-killing routine, which most readers will find chilling. Then, at the end of Chapter 39, we—and Palmer—are horrified to discover that Nipper could very well be among the birds being released at the shoot. In Chapter 40 we agonize with Palmer as the day goes on, wondering if Nipper has already been shot, if Palmer will recognize Nipper if the bird is released, if Nipper will now be shot. The suspense builds as Palmer realizes that an escaped, circling bird might be Nipper, who might fly right back to Palmer and certain death. The final scene when Beans grabs Nipper from Palmer's head and returns the bird to the shooter, with Palmer racing across the field to save his pet, is heart-stopping. We do not know until the next-to-last page whether Palmer will successfully save Nipper's life or not, and the author does not make Palmer's success seem all that likely.)

Questions 12-14 (Creative Level)

12. Predict Henry's future as part of Beans's gang.
13. Imagine you are Dorothy, and write a series of journal entries about the harassment by Beans and the other guys, plus your growing friendship with Palmer.
14. As Palmer, explain and justify to your father why the family heirloom toy soldiers are gone.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Science and Nutrition

1. Create an illustrated field guide to pigeons, including information on range, habitat, nesting sites, and prominent characteristics.
2. Using video clips, weather maps, and other visual aids, explain how and why blizzards form and what their effects can be.
3. Palmer checks the fat content of the various cereals he considers feeding Nipper. Do your own investigation of nutritional labels on cereal boxes, identifying healthy and not-so-healthy choices among them.
4. Research and report on the extinction of the passenger pigeon.

Language Arts

1. Copy five of your favorite metaphors and similes from the novel. Then write five more original, interesting, and vivid similes and metaphors of your own.
2. Here is an example of alliteration from the novel: "a summer sledder down a slope of sunsmoke." Write some alliter-

ations of your own describing scenes that are alternatively seen, smelled, tasted, heard, and touched.

3. Read other novels with themes of peer pressure and bullying and discuss with classmates the various ways in which characters in these novels experience and deal with these issues.
4. Palmer's mother calls Beans, Mutto, and Henry "hoodlums." Do you think this is an accurate use of the word?

Social Studies

1. Find out how a pattern of behavior like Beans's harassment of Dorothy would be handled at your school. Suggest any ways you think this policy could be improved.
2. Research and then conduct a class debate on issues regarding animal rights and ethical treatment of animals (including birds).
3. Research and report on various coming-of-age rituals in cultures other than the one in which Palmer is growing up.
4. Palmer, Snots, and Mutto trot past a National Guard Armory on their way to the pigeon crates. Do you have one of these armories near where you live? What is it used for?
5. Relate the story of the invention of the Ferris wheel.

Mathematics

1. It takes all day for the shooters to do away with 5,000 pigeons, starting at around 6 a.m. Calculate how many pigeons must be shot every hour to finish the shoot before dark.
2. Figure out how many miles Palmer and Dorothy would have been able to bike in half a day. Then calculate how many miles per hour Nipper would have flown to return to Waymer by dusk.

Art

1. Create an illustration of Nipper, being sure to show all the colors Palmer observes on the bird.
2. Draw a map of Waymer, including all the important sites around town like the park, the school, the downtown, and the homes of the novel's characters.
3. Model the golden pigeon Sharpshooter's Award that Palmer's father once won.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Role-play the parts of animal rights activists objecting to the Family Fest's annual pigeon shoot and other townspeople supporting the shoot.
2. Go to a city park or other place where pigeons gather. Observe and describe their various colors and markings as well as their behavior. If possible, videotape the pigeons, commenting on typical pigeon behavior you are taping. Or take photographs of the pigeons for class display.
3. Palmer hears many sounds in the night darkness of his house when he stays downstairs in the living room overnight with Nipper. Sit in the main room of your home when everyone else is sleeping and all the lights are off. What sounds do you hear? Is your home as full of sounds as Palmer's?
4. Public shooting events like Waymer's Pigeon Day do take place in the United States. Research this topic and report on what you find out. Are any shoots held near where you live?
5. Take a personal inventory of times you have succumbed to peer pressure against your better judgment. Then discuss

with classmates effective ways to resist negative peer pressure.

6. Similarly, describe instances of bullying you have experienced or witnessed, and then discuss with classmates effective ways to deal with bullies.
7. Invite a recreational hunter or shooter to class to speak on the uses of guns and gun safety.
8. Plan your ideal birthday party, or a fun birthday party for a younger child.
9. Attend a community festival like Waymer's Family Fest. List all the different attractions, including food booths, rides, amusement booths, contests, and so on. Try out foods and rides and activities, and describe the ones you liked best.
10. Set up a class Monopoly tournament for anyone who wants to join in.
11. Teach some younger kids how to play the game of hopscotch. Or set up a hopscotch tournament for interested players.
12. Develop an alternative fund-raising activity for Waymer to replace Pigeon Day.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Role-play a school conference in which a guidance counselor or vice principal confronts Beans, Mutto, Henry, and Palmer about their harassment of Dorothy. The boys' parents, Dorothy, and/or Dorothy's parents might also be present.
2. Draw up a detailed list of the novel's characters. Next to each name, describe the person's (or bird's) personality traits, the part the person/bird plays in the novel's action, and the person's/bird's relationship with Palmer.
3. Add relevant titles to each of the book's forty chapters.
4. Trace the themes of peer pressure and bullying through the course of the novel.

VOCABULARY TEST

Match each underlined word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| a. careless | f. keeping away from | k. scornful look | p. awesome |
| b. jeer at | g. shrank in fear | l. having four members | q. confused |
| c. merry | h. rapid series of shots | m. great distress | r. directly |
| d. chubby | i. highly desired | n. seriously | s. distract |
| e. smell | j. smug smile | o. feared greatly | t. unaware of |

- ___ 1. Shooters are scored according to a point system that, at day's end, rewards the most accurate of all with the coveted Sharpshooter's trophy.
- ___ 2. The shoot takes place in a festive, picnic atmosphere of barbecued chicken, water ice and frolicking children.
- ___ 3. It reminded Palmer of the moment he dreaded above all others, the moment when the not wanting to be a wringer would turn to becoming one.
- ___ 4. "Not sure?" Beans gave a smirk. "Guess I gotta start yelling then."
- ___ 5. Palmer's father inspected the bruise. He whistled softly, he nodded gravely. "Nine hard ones, huh?"
- ___ 6. "Dorothy's not one of my best friends," Palmer told his mother bluntly.
- ___ 7. Palmer played with the guys, and when they came to taunt Dorothy, he did not feel as bad as he had before.
- ___ 8. At the same time, Dorothy befuddled Palmer.
- ___ 9. If the wounded pigeons were in misery, why put them there in the first place by shooting them? Palmer wondered.
- ___ 10. Palmer began smelling the gray and sour odor of the gunsmoke even when Pigeon Day was over.
- ___ 11. Palmer cringed at what his parents would say if they found out he'd sneaked out in the middle of the night.
- ___ 12. Jogging through the dark and sleeping alleyways, skirting pools of streetlight, Palmer imagined he was a toy lead soldier come to life, going on a mission behind enemy lines.
- ___ 13. All day long, Palmer, Beans, Mutto, and Henry made a quadruple-decker sandwich as the new sled sailed and resailed down the slope.
- ___ 14. Seen from behind, the pigeon waddled. Hunger had not been its problem—it was pudgy.
- ___ 15. But how could Palmer act normal knowing there was a pigeon right here in the house, knowing that he was holding inside himself such stupendous news?
- ___ 16. It became a habit for Palmer, using Dorothy to divert attention from himself and his house.
- ___ 17. Did Nipper fly around town, oblivious to the danger?
- ___ 18. "So, how was the big party, *Snots*?" Dorothy asked with a sneer.
- ___ 19. Palmer noted two white powdery droppings that he had neglected to clean up. And a cereal box on the floor. He had been getting lax lately.
- ___ 20. A merciless fusillade the machine gun laid down, and the toy troops regrouped and joined the fire.

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. Use each name only once.

- | | | |
|-------|--|-------------------|
| _____ | 1. Very tall and meek member of the guys' gang. | a. Palmer |
| _____ | 2. Won the Sharpshooter's Award at Pigeon Day in 1989. | b. Beans |
| _____ | 3. Boasts of never brushing his teeth. | c. Mutto |
| _____ | 4. Urges Palmer to be friends with Dorothy, not Beans and his buddies. | d. Henry |
| _____ | 5. Has eight toes and orange eyes. | e. Dorothy Gruzik |
| _____ | 6. Beans's sidekick who is eager to become a wringer. | f. Mrs. LaRue |
| _____ | 7. Likes to play hopscotch and Nerf basketball. | g. Farquar |
| _____ | 8. Has dreaded becoming a wringer for years. | h. Nipper |
| _____ | 9. Yellow, highly skilled hunter and killer. | i. Mr. LaRue |
| _____ | 10. Gives the knuckle Treatment to neighborhood birthday boys. | j. Panther |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions.

1. At what age is Palmer expected to become a wringer? _____
2. What wounded creatures do wringers kill at the family festival? _____
3. What nickname do Beans and his buddies give Palmer? _____
4. What color is a pigeon's eye? _____
5. What kind of storm blows Nipper to Palmer's house and bedroom window? _____
6. Who is the author of this novel? _____
7. What weapons are used to kill the creatures at the Family Fest? _____
8. Besides Palmer, which gang member seems to be not comfortable with being mean?

9. In what part of Palmer's room does Nipper roost each night? _____
10. On what part of his body does Palmer receive The Treatment? _____

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. The events of this novel take place in the town of (Elmira, Waymer, Smalltown, Hopewell).
2. Beans, Mutto, and Henry attend Palmer's birthday party for the first time when Palmer turns (five, seven, nine, ten).
3. The pigeon-killing event takes place on the park's (Little League, softball, soccer, polo) field.
4. Many people in Palmer's town think of pigeons as (tabby cats, winged rats, potbellied pigs, messengers from heaven).
5. The wringmaster wears a bright pink (baseball cap, punk hairdo, vest, clown suit).
6. Palmer learns from a book that pigeons are very well adapted to life in/on a (mountaintop, seashore, meadow, city).
7. Just after Christmas, Palmer and the guys have lots of fun with Palmer's new (skis, snowboard, ice skates, sled) on Valentine's Hill.
8. The gang's nickname for Dorothy is (Oz, Nipper, Fishface, Loser).
9. The wringmaster tells the wringers to kill the creatures (hard and quick, slowly, in a dramatic way, secretly).
10. Henry writes this warning on the birthday cake icing: (beware, tonight, flee, wring them!).
11. Nipper announces his daily arrival outside Palmer's bedroom by (cooing loudly, tapping on the window, flapping his wings, thumping on the roof).
12. The guy gang invents a sidewalk-blocking teasing game they call (charades, walkstopping, treestumping, leapfrog).
13. Beans nails a frozen (muskrat, cat, steak, pigeon) to the door of Dorothy's home.
14. When Beans and his gang harass her, Dorothy responds by (crying, telling her parents, kicking the boys, ignoring the boys).
15. (Beans, Palmer, Mutto, Palmer's father) killed a pigeon by wringing its neck at the Family Fest when he was only five years old.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. How do the guys in Beans's gang react to Palmer having a pet pigeon? How do Palmer's parents react?
2. How does Palmer's relationship with Dorothy change over the years?
3. Why does Palmer finally reject being "one of the guys" with Beans, Mutto, and Henry?

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke, wrote, or seemed to be saying the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. You will use one name twice.

- a. Palmer
- b. Beans
- c. Henry

- d. Miss Kiner
- e. Dorothy Gruzik
- f. Mrs. LaRue

- g. Farquar
- h. Nipper
- i. Mr. LaRue

- ___ 1. "tonight"
- ___ 2. "No nothing! No Treatment! No wringer! No Snots!"
- ___ 3. "It's a bruise. It goes away. He's okay. Right, big guy?"
- ___ 4. "Why are you doing this to me?"
- ___ 5. "Left or right?...Put your finger right...here. Don't move till I say....Blindfold?"
- ___ 6. "It's yours! It came back! Kill! Kill!"
- ___ 7. "I'm not okay. He had those hoodlums here for his party."
- ___ 8. *So far so good. I think I'll like this place....Just making sure everything's as I left it.*
- ___ 9. "I have a pigeon."
- ___ 10. "Palmer, I am confident you will never spit in this room again. Now put down the chalk and go home."

Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

Write one or two words in each blank to make each statement true.

- 1. Farquar gives neighborhood boys the dreaded _____ on their birthdays.
- 2. The thrilling sharpshooters event called _____ Day is the climax of the Family Fest.
- 3. Nipper lands on Palmer's _____ in front of Beans, Mutto, and Henry, and again at the Family Fest.
- 4. Palmer's father once won a golden pigeon _____ for his sharpshooting skill.
- 5. The gray and sour smell of _____ haunts Palmer whenever he thinks about the Family Fest.
- 6. Nipper nips at Palmer's _____ each morning to wake up Palmer.
- 7. A pigeon's _____ is the size of an acorn.
- 8. Beans devotes himself to harassing _____ on the way to and from school.
- 9. Palmer's father gives Palmer toy _____ for his birthday, toys that have been part of the family for many generations.
- 10. Wringers kill pigeons by breaking the birds' _____.

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. Palmer's mother calls Beans, Mutto, and Henry (sissies, charmers, hoodlums, scholars).
2. Palmer's parents give him a (soccer ball, basketball, baseball, football) for his birthday.
3. Dorothy often plays (jump rope, hopscotch, chess, jacks) on the sidewalk outside her house.
4. Pigeons for the shoot are captured at/on the city's (skyscrapers, wildlife refuge, cemetery, railroad yards).
5. Palmer's father once won a golden (Millionaire's, Animal Welfare, Oscar, Sharpshooter's) Award.
6. At the Family Fest, (500; 1,000; 5,000; 10,000) pigeons are shot.
7. At the end of each day, when it starts to get dark, pigeons (roost, eat, wake up, crow).
8. Palmer gets information about pigeons from (the Internet, a library book, a local pigeon breeder, his mother).
9. Palmer thinks of Nipper as his morning (alarm clock, nag, homework helper, advisor).
10. (Dorothy, Henry, Beans, Mutto) warns Palmer that the gang will try to harm Nipper.
11. Palmer keeps a supply of (M&M candies, Honey Crunchers cereal, dog biscuits, bird seed) in his bedroom for Nipper.
12. Palmer and Dorothy often play in Palmer's bedroom with a (Frisbee, DVD player, Nerf basketball, remote-controlled car).
13. Palmer spends one night in his home hiding from Beans and Mutto (in his bedroom closet, in the cellar, behind the living room sofa, in his parents' bedroom).
14. Arthur Dodds gets the nickname (Snots, Mutto, Fishface, Beans).
15. The wringmaster says wounded pigeons are called (flopsters, roadkill, nippers, croakers).

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What happens at the Pigeon Day shoot when Palmer is ten years old?
2. Why does Palmer name his pet Nipper? Why does he keep Nipper a secret from everyone?
3. Why does Palmer spend years dreading his tenth birthday? How does he finally resolve this problem?

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

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

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 6. c |
| 2. i | 7. e |
| 3. b | 8. a |
| 4. f | 9. j |
| 5. h | 10. g |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1. ten | 6. Jerry Spinelli |
| 2. pigeons | 7. shotguns |
| 3. Snots | 8. Henry |
| 4. orange | 9. closet |
| 5. blizzard | 10. upper arm |

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Waymer | 9. hard and quick |
| 2. nine | 10. tonight |
| 3. soccer | 11. tapping on the window |
| 4. winged rats | 12. treestumping |
| 5. baseball cap | 13. muskrat |
| 6. city | 14. ignoring the boys |
| 7. sled | 15. Beans |
| 8. Fishface | |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. b |
| 2. a | 7. f |
| 3. i | 8. h |
| 4. e | 9. a |
| 5. g | 10. d |

Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. Treatment | 6. earlobe |
| 2. Pigeon | 7. heart |
| 3. head | 8. Dorothy |
| 4. statue/award | 9. soldiers |
| 5. gunsmoke | 10. necks |

Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. hoodlums | 9. alarm clock |
| 2. soccer ball | 10. Henry |
| 3. hopscotch | 11. Honey Crunchers cereal |
| 4. railroad yards | 12. Nerf basketball |
| 5. Sharpshooter's | 13. behind the living room sofa |
| 6. 5,000 | 14. Beans |
| 7. roost | 15. floppers |
| 8. a library book | |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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