



Double Dutch

by Sharon M. Draper

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Kay Wheeler

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

Delia and Charlene try to avoid the Tolliver twins, Titan and Tabu. Rumors abound about the mysterious twins, who dress in all-black and menace students in the halls. Even the teachers appear scared of them, including Miss Benson, their English teacher, who is enthusiastic and well-liked, but, as a first-year teacher, inexperienced and not yet good at controlling the rowdies. During English class, Miss Benson asks Delia if she is jumping on the Double Dutch team and Delia's friend, Yolanda, chimes in, bragging about how good their team is (she is also a member) and telling one of her many tall tales, which Miss Benson believes. Randy Youngblood teases YoYo about her storytelling, and the exchange quickly escalates into a duel of "your mama" jokes. As the teacher breaks up the spat, YoYo is heard to mutter, "At least I got a mama." Randy tries to hide his pain, but in fact, Randy's mother abandoned him and his father a few years ago, and they haven't heard from her since. Delia loves the way Randy makes class fun; he is also a straight-A student. Miss Benson reminds the class of the upcoming state proficiency exams and hands out parental permission forms. Then the class begins studying a new book: *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding. Delia flips through the pages and plans to get the videotape. She has a secret: though she has an excellent memory, she can't read.

Chapter 2

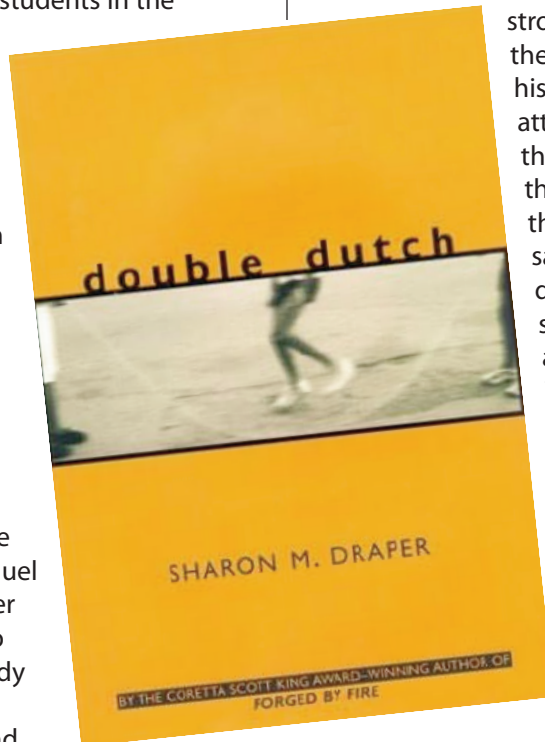
Randy lets himself into the apartment he shares with his father. Randy has just turned fourteen, stands over six feet tall, and is always hungry. He greets the cat and thinks about how he likes Delia. He turns on the television and is stunned to find the Tolliver twins as guests on a talk show segment about "parents who can't han-

dle their impossible teens." After calling to alert Yolanda—who is already watching with Delia and Charlene and promises to tape the show—he continues watching. Mrs. Tolliver explains that the boys have never played with other children—only each other; even in kindergarten, they stuck to themselves, and sometime got in trouble for hitting other kids. Further, the death of the boys' father when they were small strongly affected the two. The host asks the boys about their names. Titan says his father named the twins for personal attributes: Titan because he wanted them to grow strong, Tabu because they were always getting blamed for things they didn't do. The twins, Titan says, were just trying to fulfill the predictions inherent in their names, a statement the talk-show host takes as a threat to the community. Mrs. Tolliver reveals that she's agreed to go on the show because the producers have promised psychological help for her children. Later, Delia and Randy discuss the show over the phone; Delia is frightened, and Randy assures her he'll protect her from the Tollivers while warning her to be careful when she's walking alone. Afterwards, Randy ponders the conversation, wondering

how big a threat the Tollivers really are while reflecting that he would never have expressed his feelings to Delia if the twins hadn't been so threatening. He enjoys talking to Delia. However, Randy, too, has a secret he can't tell anyone about: he hasn't heard from his dad, a trucker, in six weeks, and he's running out of food and money. His only company at home is his cat.

Chapter 3

The next morning before school starts, everyone is talking about the Tollivers being on television. Jesse, Yolanda's latest love interest, tells everyone to watch their backs. Speculation abounds about whether the school will resort to metal detectors and police patrols. Randy questions if the Tollivers have even done anything wrong, which silences everyone. School begins amid an atmosphere of fear. Yolanda breezes through



class, while Delia struggles, feeling overwhelmed by the work load. At lunch, Delia listens tolerantly to Yolanda's exaggerations; friends with her since the first grade, Delia long ago realized that Yolanda tells stories to make up for the deficiencies in life at home, where her father is loud and demanding and her mother addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. In turn, Yolanda has noticed that Delia gets upset whenever Miss Benson mentions the proficiency test; when prodded, Delia confesses she has only passed the math portion of the practice test, and Yolanda reveals that she knows Delia's secret. Delia cries, telling how she's been fooling the adults for years, partially to shield her mother, who was so miserable after her father left them that Yolanda believed she wouldn't have the emotional energy to help. Yolanda offers to help Delia.

Chapter 4

Delia loses herself in the enjoyment of Double Dutch practice on Saturday. Bomani is the coach, and Randy is the equipment manager. Delia is a natural jumper. A member of the Queen Bees Double Dutch team since fifth grade, Delia is very skilled, and loves the challenge. She ignores Yolanda and Charlene's teasing about Randy, jumping effortlessly until Randy arrives, distracting her.

Chapter 5

Delia feels overwhelmingly conscious of Randy, and wishes she could joke with him as easily as the other girls do. She knows little about him, except that his father is a long-distance trucker and his mother allegedly abandoned them for the mailman. The gym fills with other jumpers; after practice, there's a competition to pick the teams for the state tournament. Bomani, late as always, finally arrives, and the competition begins. Delia and her team jump well enough to make the state team, although their performance isn't perfect; Delia spots the Tollivers in the stands, but it doesn't throw her off-stride.

Chapter 6

At school Monday, Delia, Charlene, and Yolanda wait for the bell to ring and worry about media reports of school shootings and other violence in relation to their fears about the Tollivers. After a brief interlude in which Randy flirts with Delia, the students enter the school, giving a wide berth to the Tollivers, who, despite their televised threats to act out, have been permitted to remain in school; reportedly, the school board has ruled that it must allow them to attend, since they haven't actually done anything. Yolanda heads to class to finish reading *Lord of the Flies*, offering Delia help, which Delia

refuses. Randy compliments Delia on her Double Dutch performance, and Delia tells Randy she admires his ability to be alone for long stretches when his dad is gone. Randy replies that it is school, not home, that seems dangerous to him, because of the Tollivers. In math, the one class where she does well, Delia answers correctly, and reflects that the Tollivers also do well in class—in fact, they appear to be smarter than they let on. The Tollivers make no waves, instead benefiting from the awe in which they are held. In Social Studies class, in a direct reference to bullying and the Tollivers, Mrs. Parker conducts a discussion about fear and aggression, and how they affect people, making the point that Hitler's regime exemplified the fear of some people to stand up to the aggression of others. Another student, Jesse—who had transferred to the school at about the same time the Tollivers did—asks if anyone has ever tried to make friends with the Tollivers. Mrs. Parker agrees that “sometimes the best way to destroy an enemy is by making friends with him.” After the class discussion, Delia realizes that Mrs. Parker's discussion has released some of the tension the students were feeling.

Chapter 7

In English class, Miss Benson divides the class into groups, but no one picks the Tolliver twins. To keep up, Delia watches the videotape of *Lord of the Flies*, and listens carefully to the class. A discussion ensues about the ability of young children—such as the nine-, ten-, and eleven-year-olds of the book—to survive alone. Delia asks Randy how he would do alone, and he tells her he'd be fine. Yolanda makes up a story about being abandoned in London for six months, which Randy chides her for. Randy notes that being “civilized” has to do with the ways people treat each other; Jesse believes that things turned out badly in *Lord of the Flies* because the boys “couldn't figure out what was true and what was just a nightmare,” and that fear was what triggered their problems. Delia's group decides to do a presentation on modern-day fears and lies.

Chapter 8

That night at Double Dutch practice, the girls discuss how the sport has helped them. Misty says it “saved her life” after her father died and her mother became too sick to work, leaving Misty with responsibility for four younger sisters. Double Dutch gave her an anchor and motivated her to improve her grades, since good grades are required for team membership. Delia noted that the sport had motivated her to get better grades, too. Delia demonstrates her photographic memory to a skeptical Misty, then wonders how she can be so smart in some

ways and so dumb in others. Later, Delia panics when Randy announces that the school board has decided all eighth-grade Double Dutch participants must pass the proficiency test in order to continue on the team in ninth grade. Yolanda assures Delia that they'll "figure something out."

Chapter 9

Randy goes home to an empty house. He hasn't heard from his father in a month. Randy's afraid to call the police, lest he get his father in trouble and wind up in foster care. With the remaining \$17 of the emergency money, Randy buys groceries; he eats dinner, then calls Delia. He lies to Delia, telling her he has heard from his father and expects him home soon. Delia tells Randy he can count on her. After talking to Delia, Randy gets a call from the power company; Randy buys himself some time by assuring the representative that he has mailed the check. Later that night, Randy lies in bed, missing his father and worrying.

Chapter 10

Delia has to comfort her mother after Mom sees Dad with his new wife, Jillian. Delia must now spend every other weekend with the new couple, an arrangement she doesn't like but acquiesces to because she loves her father and wants to keep everyone happy. At school Yolanda claims the Tollivers are planning mischief, basing her claim on a second-hand story about something read on the Web. Charlene and Delia tell Yolanda not to spread unconfirmed stories. Later, at a school assembly, Office Bobby Brown introduces himself and announces that the school will install metal detectors and begin spot-checking for drugs and alcohol; he extends an invitation to the students to report anything suspicious or dangerous, or "just to talk." Yolanda blames the changes on the Tolliver twins. In English class, Delia, Yolanda, Randy, and Jesse work on their project, and Yolanda invites everyone over to her house to study. The Tolliver twins tell Miss Benson they're doing their project on the killings in *Lord of the Flies*, and the class is "never going to forget" the surprise presentation.

Chapter 11

A few weeks later, the Ohio State Double Dutch Championships are held in Columbus; the team of Delia, Charlene, and Yolanda wins a spot in the national finals, called "world championships" because teams from several other countries compete as well. The weekend after the state championships, Randy is out of money. He pawns his VCR to Mr. Clifford, who asks about Randy's dad and gives him more than the VCR is worth. In

answer to Mr. Clifford's questions, Randy claims his dad has been sick. Not fooled, Mr. Clifford advises Randy to give \$50 to the electric company, \$30 to the phone company, and \$100 toward the rent, and to come back if his dad's "illness" doesn't subside. Randy thanks Mr. Clifford, then leaves and does as he's advised. Randy begins to face the possibility that his father has abandoned him. Later that night, Delia calls, sharing her worries about school, storms, and the Tolliver twins. Randy listens, thinking about his own fears.

Chapter 12

The next Double Dutch practice goes badly. Randy yells at Delia for jumping poorly; the two argue, and Bomani yells at both of them. Later, Randy apologizes to Delia and asks if he can call her later; he has something he wants to talk about. He also gladly accepts Delia's mother's offer of a ride home. During the ride, they talk about the hot "tornado weather" they've been experiencing, and the upcoming competition. Randy thinks the team has a "home-court advantage," since the world championships will be held in Cincinnati; Delia's mother says it means more pressure as well. Randy goes home to a dark apartment.

Chapter 13

Randy calls Delia, but can't bring himself to tell her the truth about his father. Instead, he concocts a story about his father wanting him to move to California after the Double Dutch competition. He figures this is safe, since he'll be put in foster care and forced to leave anyway if his father doesn't reappear soon. He asks to borrow money from Delia until he receives the money he claims his father has already sent. Delia gladly agrees to lend him the money. That night, Randy has trouble sleeping. The next day, the school, which isn't air-conditioned, is oppressively hot. Delia and Randy's group give their presentation, to applause from the class. Yolanda gets permission to go to the restroom as everyone prepares to hear the Tolliver twins' presentation, which is next.

Chapter 14

As Titan and Tabu Tolliver begin their presentation, a storm begins to threaten outside. The Tollivers note that *Lord of the Flies* is about death, evil, and fear—specifically, "fear of what you don't know and don't understand." They assert that the school has acted like the kids in the book, unfairly judging and mistreating them without provocation. As they make this statement, the lights go out, and pandemonium ensues. Sirens are heard inside and out, the principal announces that tornadoes have

been spotted in the area, and Delia notices the Tollivers running out of the room. The light goes out and the loudspeaker goes dead; Miss Benson orders everyone to lie to down on the floor, next to the inside wall and away from the windows. As the tornado goes by, the students hear a deafening sound like that of a train engine. In the quiet aftermath, windows are broken and desks strewn everywhere; Delia screams for Yolanda, who has not returned, and points out that Tabu and Titan also are not accounted for. Miss Benson assures her and the other students that help is on the way, as sirens sound in the distance.

Chapter 15

Miss Benson feels responsible for the missing twins. After at least a half-hour, a fireman appears, asking if anyone is hurt. The students learn that twin tornadoes have hit the school. Firemen evacuate the class, along with the rest of the school, and the next hour is spent with students reuniting with parents. There is still no sign of Tabu, Titan, or Yolanda. Bomani arrives at the school and gives both Delia and Randy, who are waiting outside, a big hug. Bomani quizzes Randy about his missing father, then informs Randy that he will take him to his (Bomani's) house after Delia's mother picks her up. Mrs. Tolliver and Yolanda's mother arrive, and Delia tells them their children are missing. Mrs. Tolliver explains that the boys are terrified of storms, since they witnessed their father being killed by a falling tree during a storm when they were small. Just then, a policewoman summons the adults, and Delia and Randy tag along. They watch as a bleeding Tabu emerges, followed by Titan, who is carrying Yolanda.

Chapter 16

A paramedic checks the three out. Tabu's gash requires stitches. Yolanda appears lifeless, but revives and asks if she's dead, breaking the tension and causing everyone to laugh. She remembers being hit in the head. The boys, similarly, were hit by falling debris, and Tabu was knocked out. After the storm passed, they spotted Yolanda; they carried her out with them, thinking she was dead. Delia's mother arrives. She hugs her daughter and thanks Miss Benson for keeping her and the other students safe. She tells Bomani she has heard the school will be closed for the rest of the year, and the state proficiency tests postponed indefinitely. Delia whoops in delight.

Chapter 17

At Bomani's house, Randy wonders how to tell him about his father. The TV news praises the heroism of the

Tolliver twins, and Bomani's children treat Randy like a hero as well. After eating a huge dinner, Randy tells Bomani privately that he thinks he's been abandoned, he's out of money, and he doesn't know what to do. Bomani assures Randy that his father would never leave him purposely, and tells him he can stay with his family. Randy is relieved.

Chapter 18

On the phone, Yolanda tells Delia of the phone conversation she's just had with the Tollivers. After thanking them profusely and hearing the tale of how they stumbled on her in the dark, Yolanda is surprised to discover that the Tolliver twins like the same "stuff" she and Delia do—the same groups, TV shows, music, etc. They further reveal that they both like Yolanda, and that their presence at the first Double Dutch competition was so they could watch her. After the conversation ends, Delia looks forward to seeing the pictures in tomorrow's newspaper, even though she knows she won't be able to read the words.

Chapter 19

A happy Delia attends the Double Dutch competition with Yolanda and the others; even though the event is in Cincinnati, the team still gets to stay in the hosting hotel and swim in the hotel pool. On a jaunt to the lobby to buy chocolate, Delia decides to go outside to watch the various teams unload. There, she spots a flyer taped to a pole. The flyer has a picture of Randy's father on it. Frustrated that she can't see the words, Delia rips the poster down. She speculates that Randy's father might have committed a crime and be running from the law. She mentally runs through her options: if she tells her mother or Bomani, they might call the police, making more trouble for Randy. She decides to keep Randy's secret. Later, at a team meeting, she listens to Bomani's pep talk and watches as Randy irons team shirts in the corner. She decides against telling Yolanda, not wanting to betray Randy, and wonders if she should throw the poster away.

Chapter 20

Friday is the semi-final competition; only five of the teams in each grade and division will go on to the finals on Saturday. The Queen Bees jump very well, and are selected in all three divisions. That night, at a party, teams from all over dance and jump together, united in their love of Double Dutch. In the morning are finals.

Chapter 21

The air in the gym is electric on the day of the competi-

tion. All five teams are jumping at one time for the championship. Delia, Yolanda, and Charlene perform their singles and doubles freestyle routines well. Delia notices Randy on the sidelines, and worries what will become of him. Finally, the winners are announced. The Queen Bees place second in the singles and first in the eighth-grade doubles. They are world champions! They savor the moment as they receive their trophies and championship jackets. However, after the gym empties, Randy confronts Delia with the poster, which he says has fallen out of her gym bag. He is angry that she's hidden it from him, and stalks away before she can explain.

Chapter 22

Randy shows Bomani the flyer, and it turns out that it is seeking information about Randy's father's identity; Delia had thought it was a "wanted" poster and that she was shielding Randy. Finally, under Randy's questioning, Delia tearfully admits that she can't read. Randy wonders how she could have hidden the fact from everyone, and she reminds him that he easily hid his "abandonment" as well. Still angry, Randy leaves a remorseful Delia crying on the bleachers.

Chapter 23

Later, Delia's mother arrives and offers to take her to a restaurant to celebrate. Delia freezes at the sight of the menu, which is not illustrated. Delia orders hamburgers and fries to cover her inability to read the menu, even though she would really prefer something else. Finally, Delia confesses to her mother that she can't read, and her inability almost caused Randy to lose his chance to find his father. To her surprise, Delia's mother is not angry with Delia, but with herself; she reassures Delia that she is not a loser, and promises to help her overcome her disability. Happier now, Delia asks if she can finish her mother's pasta.

Chapter 24

At home, Delia calls Yolanda and tells her she's confessed to her mom. Yolanda is glad it went well; she's learned that "lies will get you nowhere." Delia then calls Randy's apartment; to her surprise, he answers the phone. Randy is still angry with Delia, but in answer to her questions, he tells her that the posters were from Columbus; a woman vacationing there had found Randy's father and called the police. His father had been beaten by thugs, who hit him on the head with a hammer and left him for dead after stealing his truck, cell phone, money, and identification; he had only started to come around about the time of the tornado. Delia offers to ask her mom to drive Randy to Columbus, but

Randy says Bomani is going to do it, then abruptly hangs up on her. Delia stares into the phone, feeling empty and lost.

Chapter 25

The next morning, Bomani picks Randy up, stopping once at Randy's request so Randy can visit Mr. Clifford's shop to thank him and give him an update. Once back in the truck, Bomani asks Randy why he's angry with Delia. Randy tells him about the flyer that Delia almost threw away, nearly causing him to be alone forever; Bomani advises Randy to give Delia a break. Randy confesses his worries that his father won't recognize him, and that things will be different between them. Bomani advises him that "Everything changes, ... and yet somehow things remain constant."

Chapter 26

Late Sunday afternoon, Delia sits on her front step, trying to avoid listening to her parents arguing over the phone, and lamenting the loss of Randy's friendship. She berates herself for causing Randy pain and being unable to read. Delia's mom comes to the door and tells her Randy is on the phone. Heart pounding, Delia asks Randy about his dad. He is happy because his dad will be coming home in a few days, and the doctors say he'll be all right. Delia apologizes again. Randy tells her that it isn't her fault, and that if it hadn't been for her and the Double Dutch competition, he never would have seen the flyer. He reassures her that she's a real winner and will be able to learn to read, then hangs up to get the apartment ready for his father's return. Teary-eyed but smiling, Delia reflects on everything that has happened, then returns to the house.

Author Sketch

Sharon Draper was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1952. She is the oldest daughter of Victor Mills, a hotel head waiter, and Catherine Mills, a classified advertising manager for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. Mrs. Draper credits her parents with introducing her to the world of books and is a self-described bookworm: "I inhaled books and knowledge." While still in elementary school, Draper realized that she wanted to be a teacher.



Draper was an excellent student. In high school she took advanced and honors courses; her high score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) earned her the designation of National Merit Scholar. Draper enrolled at

Pepperdine University, located in Malibu, California, and graduated in 1971, with a degree in English. Pepperdine offered her a teaching position upon graduation, but she decided to return to Ohio, where she earned a Master of Arts degree in 1974, from Miami University of Ohio. During this time she married Larry Draper, who is also a teacher. The couple has four children.

While working in the Cincinnati Public School system, Draper earned a reputation as a challenging educator. She demanded the best from her students and promised excellence as a teacher as well. One of Draper's writing assignments became legendary. At Walnut Hills High School, the seniors were required to write a research paper, dubbed "The Draper Paper." Those who successfully completed the assignment earned a T-shirt that boasted, "I survived the Draper Paper."

In 1997, Draper was named Ohio's Teacher of the Year, and in April of that year, she earned the title of U.S. Teacher of the Year. At a ceremony in Washington, D.C., President Bill Clinton honored her for her many years of service. While delivering her acceptance speech, she complimented her fellow teachers, saying, "I am so proud to be a teacher. I'm proud of my colleagues, 3 million of us, who strive every day in the classrooms across the country to make a difference in the lives of students."

Draper's writing career began when her short story "One Small Torch" won first prize in *Ebony* magazine's annual Gertrude Johnson Williams Literary Competition. She retired from teaching in 2005 to write full-time, with the goal of creating stories young people would find contemporary and exciting. She has won numerous awards from her writing, including the Coretta Scott King Award and an American Library Association "Best Book for Young Adults."

Critic's Corner

Double Dutch is an exploration of the way secrets and fear negatively affect people's relationships and lives, and how a group of contemporary teens work through these problems while confronting some tough social issues. Critical reception for the book was mixed, with *Publisher's Weekly* calling it "disappointing," with "rambling conversations and extraneous details," and *School Library Journal* citing "mundane teenage conversations and tedious descriptive details." But there was praise for the book as well. The *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* called *Double Dutch* "a well-paced and engagingly

detailed exploration of a double-sided world of public and private truths that teens will find very familiar," and *Kirkus Reviews* lauded the "fast-paced and multi-layered story" with "delightful" characters. *Booklist* noted that "Teens will like the high-spirited, authentic dialogue (including lots of "your mama" jokes), the honest look at tough issues, and the team workout scenes that show how sports can transform young lives." Even *School Library Journal*, despite its criticisms, noted that "The author [creates] vibrant, engaging characters with unique voices," and praised Draper's "convincing portrayal of how young people think, act, feel, and interact with one another."

Other Works by Sharon Draper

Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs (1994)

Tears of a Tiger (1995)

Lost in the Tunnel of Time (1996)

Shadow's of Caesar's Creek (1997)

Forged by Fire (1997)

Darkness Before Dawn (2001)

The Battle of Jericho (2003)

Copper Sun (2006)

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www.notablebiographies.com/news/Ca-Ge/Draper-Sharon.html

<http://www.bookrags.com/biography/sharon-m-draper-aya/>

<http://www.argusleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/>

<http://sharondraper.com>

Periodicals

Lesesne, Teri S. "To Instruct, To Inspire, To Entertain: the World of Sharon Draper." *Teacher Librarian* (October 2002): pp. 47-50

Starling, Kelly. "Ebony contest-Winner Scores in Education and Art." *Ebony* (May 1998): pp. 126-129

Objectives

General Objectives

1. To read and discuss contemporary fiction
2. To analyze the novel's title
3. To assess main character's personality
4. To comment on adolescent relationships
5. To recognize the novel's themes
6. To sympathize with the main characters plight
7. To find examples of compassion

8. To analyze style and its function
9. To evaluate relations between the narrator, characters, and reader

Specific Objectives

1. To understand the effects of secrets
2. To recognize the importance of family support
3. To understand the importance of sports and school activities
4. To evaluate the affects of rumors
5. To determine how the novel generates humor and emotion
6. To see how Delia matures
7. To describe how Delia copes without being able to read
8. To sort the web of relationships between characters
9. To comment on the novel’s structure
10. To evaluate the novel as literature

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Sharon Draper’s style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Characterization: the way in which a writer portrays the characters in a book. Writers can tell about characters directly, by letting readers in on the characters’ thoughts and actions, or they can let readers reach their own conclusions through the comments, thoughts, and reactions of the other characters. Draper uses both direct and indirect characterization to show how Delia, Yolanda, and Randy cope with their lives.

Conflict: There are two kinds of conflict. In an external conflict, characters struggle against a force outside themselves. In an internal conflict, characters battle a force within themselves. *Double Dutch* has strong external and internal conflicts, including Delia’s struggle in school and the guilt she feels for nearly causing Randy to lose his father forever.

Metaphor: a figure of speech that directly compares two seemingly unrelated subjects. “All the world’s a stage” is a metaphor. “The sky showed very little sign of the anger that had exploded from it so recently” is an example of a metaphor from the book.

Simile: a figure of speech that compares two seemingly unrelated subjects using “like” or “as.” “My love is like a red, red rose” is a simile. “It was the test. It was rumbling down the road like a runaway truck, and she was standing, helpless, directly in its path” is an example of a simile from the book.

Cross-Curricular Sources

DVD and Video

- Stanley and Iris*, MGM/UA (1990)
- Lord of the Flies*, MGM (1963 & 1990)
- Internet

Double Dutch

- National Double Dutch League, <http://www.national-doubledutchleague.com>
- American Double Dutch League, <http://www.usaddl.org>

Reading

- <http://www.starfall.com/>

Double Dutch in Literature

- Veronica Chambers, *Double Dutch: A Celebration of Jump Rope, Rhyme, and Sisterhood*
- Kyra Gaunt, *Games Black Girls Play*

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations on Sharon Draper’s *Double Dutch* should include these aspects:

Themes

- secrets
- illiteracy
- fear
- lies
- abandonment
- family
- kindness
- peer pressure
- coping skills
- success

Motifs

- effects of keeping secrets
- frustration of being illiterate
- being consumed by fear
- effects of lies
- self-reliance
- importance of parental involvement
- experiencing and showing kindness
- evolving maturity
- self-protection
- personal discovery

Meaning Study

Below are significant quotes from the novel. Explain each in context. Page-numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. "Nothing is really as it seems, she thought as the ropes twisted in her hands." (p. 64)
(Delia realized that everyone has something difficult to deal with. Knowing what Misty has to face sparks Delia's admiration, and makes her realize that she is not alone in having problems to deal with.)
2. "Sometimes the best way to destroy an enemy is by making friends with him. It's probably hard to transfer into a school when the school year has already started." (p. 52)
(Mrs. Parks, the social studies teacher, wants the students to realize that they can make a difference by reaching out to the Tolliver twins. By befriending the boys, the students would learn that the twins were not enemies and their fears were unfounded. She wanted to stress that the twins were under pressure and had fears as well. Entering school mid-year made it more difficult to make friends, and the rumors made it harder for the twins to fit in.)
3. "Seems to me that things got really bad for them 'cause they couldn't figure out what was true and what was just a nightmare. Bunch of little kids running around so scared, they got things really messed up." (p.58)
(Delia's class was reading Lord of the Flies as a class assignment. The story line of Double Dutch parallels that of Lord of the Flies in that lies and confusion cause the boys to make decisions out of fear, just as lies and rumors spur Delia and her friends to make incorrect assumptions about the Tolliver twins.)
4. "Information, maybe. Truth? I doubt it. Don't go spreading stuff unless you're sure, YoYo." (p. 77)
(Delia warns Yolanda not to spread stories without being sure they are true. Yolanda has just related a story she overheard about the Tolliver twins that a girl she knows claims was on a Web site. Delia stresses that information can be obtained on the Internet, but not everything on the Internet is true.)
5. "What was Randy's father doing on a poster?" (p. 146)
(When Delia went to buy candy in the lobby of the hotel, she stepped outside and saw a picture of Randy's father on a poster. Had she been able to read, she would have known that it wasn't a "Wanted" poster, but a flyer asking for anyone who

recognized the man to contact authorities. Being unable to read caused Delia to make a bad decision.)

6. "It's not so hard to hide the truth, Randy. Look at what you did. Nobody knew you were living all alone." (p. 166)
(Randy has a hard time believing that Delia's mother doesn't know she can't read. He is amazed that she has been able to hide it for so long. Delia explains that it's not that difficult to hide. She tells Randy that she recognizes the size and colors of packages at the grocery store, that menus have pictures, and that she picks the Number Two with a Coke at the fast food restaurant. Delia also points out that Randy has had no trouble hiding the fact that his father has been missing for two months.)
7. "Now I know you are intelligent. To be able to fake it this long shows amazing ingenuity." (p. 172)
(Delia's mother is telling her that she is smart. Keeping this secret for so long demonstrates just how intelligent she really is. Learning to read may end up being much easier than hiding the fact that she can't read.)
8. "I'm the one who feels like a failure here." (p. 172)
(Delia's mother explains that she should have noticed Delia's struggle with reading. She feels that she has failed Delia.)
9. "Quit talking bad about yourself! You jumped like a winner today, because that's what you are," Mrs. Douglas said fiercely. "Losers don't get to wear that beautiful jacket you've got on." (p. 173)
(Delia feels like a loser because she can't read. Her mother tells her that she is not a failure or a loser. She is a talented, intelligent young woman, and the jacket is proof that she is a winner.)
10. "She smiled and headed back into the house, carrying the rhythms with her." (p. 183)
(Delia sits on her porch, content that all the secrets are out in the open. Everything has come together in the end: she will now learn to read, and Randy's father will be coming home. As she does when doing Double Dutch ropes, she finds happiness with the rhythms in her life.)

Comprehension Study

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

answers with quotations.

Character

1. Contrast Delia’s intellectual and emotional abilities.
(The fact that Delia cannot read does not mean that she is not smart. She is a very intelligent girl who has figured out how to fool all of her teachers as well as her parents. Delia does well in other classes and can memorize something the first time she hears or sees it. She is also very strong emotionally; she has endured the breakup of her father’s marriage and his unwelcome remarriage, and has hidden her problem from her mother in an attempt to shield her from further heartache. She is too young to realize the consequences to herself.)

Style

2. Characterize the style.
(The novel is written in narrative style that often uses humor to depict the nature of the main characters. The style mirrors Delia’s speech and mannerisms.)

Character Development

3. Does Delia change or develop during the novel?
(Delia begins to realize that her decision to keep her secret was the wrong choice. Because she could not read, she nearly caused Randy to lose his father forever. The remorse she feels for this misjudgment, and because she tells her mother about her situation, shows that she has grown and is willing to accept the consequences.)

Conflict

4. Explain the web of conflicts between the Tolliver twins and the other students.
(The Tolliver twins have caused most of their own problems. Their manner of dress and their actions have confused and frightened the other students, as well as adults. Jesse was a new student who assimilated well, but the twins remained aloof, spurring rumors and fear.)

Interpretation

5. Is knowing the background of Delia’s family important to a reading of *Double Dutch*?
(Knowing that Delia’s mother is struggling after the divorce helps to understand how she could be unaware of Delia’s situation, as well as Delia’s desire to spare her mother further pain. Understanding that Delia is actually quite intelligent helps the reader believe Delia could pull this off.)

Motivation

6. Explain Randy’s decision to keep secret the fact that he has not heard from his father in weeks.
(Randy is fearful that he will cause his father problems if he tells anyone he has been left alone. Further, Randy does not want to be placed in foster care, and also struggles with the possibility that his father’s absence might be deliberate. Randy still suffers because of his mother’s abandonment years ago, and has a hard time facing the possibility that his father has done the same thing.)

Author Method

7. How does the reader learn about Delia?
(The author uses Delia’s words and thoughts to establish Delia’s character. She also draws the reader into the lives of Delia and the other characters through descriptions of people and places.)

Image

8. List and discuss the various uses of the double image in the novel.
*(The Tolliver twins are only one example of the double image. The twin twisters help reveal the truth about the Tolliver twins. Delia has two good friends, and this gives her double the support. Delia’s participation in *Double Dutch* helps Delia cope with her life, and the image of the double ropes used in the sport gives her double the strength to hang on. And Delia is facing two major hurdles in her life: the *Double Dutch* competition and the looming proficiency test. If Delia does not pass the proficiency exam, she will have to endure the double loss of not graduating to the ninth grade and not being allowed to participate on the *Double Dutch* team any longer.)*

Text

9. List and discuss the different kinds of text displayed in the novel.
(The “main” text drives the narrative and records Delia’s thoughts and feelings. The speeches do the obvious—recount conversations—but they also illustrate Delia’s social mannerisms and point out that she uses contemporary jargon.)

Across the Curriculum

Drama/Performance

1. Select sections of dialogue from the novel and perform them. Do characters have recognizable speech patterns?

2. Recast a chapter from Titan and Tabu's point of view.
3. Debate whether or not *Double Dutch* should be mandatory reading in your grade level.
4. Working with a partner, role-play a scene between Mrs. Douglas and Ms. Benson in which Mrs. Douglas tells Ms. Benson that Delia cannot read.

Math

1. Why didn't Delia have problems with math? Is there a connection between reading and math, or do they use different learning abilities?
2. Is Double Dutch an expensive sport? What is the average cost of belonging to a Double Dutch team?

History/Social Studies

1. When did Double Dutch competition start?
2. Are there famous Double Dutch artists? List them.
3. Is Double Dutch considered a sport? Why?
4. Write a paper on the effects of sports on school students. What has been the value of after-school sports and activities?

Art

1. Find a picture of Double Dutch teams and give a PowerPoint presentation on the sport.
2. Make a model of the school before the twisters hit.
3. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural of the main events.

Cinema/Film

1. Select quotes and passages from the novel that you think capture Delia's personality best. Write a vignette and perform it.
2. Watch the movie *Stanley and Iris*. Discuss the effects of illiteracy. Compare Delia's life to Stanley's life. Will there be significant differences for Delia, since she will learn to read earlier?
3. Make a film about Delia, Randy, Yolanda, and Jesse's Martian attack presentation.

Language

1. The novel uses sarcastic street slang in the dialogue. How important is the use of slang to the novel?
2. Write a scene from the novel without street slang. Does the tenor of the novel change?

Journalism

1. Write a newspaper article about the Double Dutch Competition.
2. Make an advertisement for the sale of tickets to the competition. Include the sale of ropes, shirts, and attire for the sport.
3. Create a poster for a missing person. Give as much information as you can. Give a description of the person, list the location where he was found, and include a number to call for more information.
4. Write an article about TV talk shows. Compare different types of talk shows. Should young people be allowed to appear on these shows? Should young people be allowed to watch these shows? Are they valuable for the public?

Literature

1. Write an essay in which you discuss humor in *Double Dutch*. What sort of humor appears in the novel? What generates the humor? Is the humor situational, linguistic, or a combination?
2. Write an essay in which you contrast Delia's internal reactions to events or scenarios with the reader's internal reactions to the same situations. How does the contrast between the two generate emotion in the novel?
3. Read aloud passages that give a clear sense of the main characters' personalities. Discuss the main features of each character's personality and also how it is communicated. Is the character primarily defined through how he or she thinks, speaks, acts, or a combination?

Composition

1. Write a short scene about having metal detectors put in schools. How does this affect the students? Would this change the perception of the school?
2. Compose a diary from Misty's perspective. How does she feel about her life? Does Double Dutch mean

as much to her as it does to Delia?

3. Write a letter that Mr. Douglas might write to Delia. How does he feel about Delia not knowing how to read? Is he proud of her?

Psychology

1. How do lies affect a relationship?
2. What causes “cliques” in schools? Why are some students accepted while others are ostracized?
3. What effect do metal detectors and security guards have on school students?

Economics

1. What is the literacy rate in this country? How does illiteracy affect the economy?
2. Does a higher literacy rate affect the economy? How?
3. Do other countries have a higher rate of literacy? List them. Is their economy better?

Education

1. Make an oral report on the importance of reading. What are the consequences of being illiterate?
2. Research teaching strategies for people learning to read later in life.

Alternate Assessment

1. Discuss what you learned about life from *Double Dutch*.
2. Make a list of actions that show Delia is smart.
3. Read another novel by Draper, and compare and contrast it to *Double Dutch*.
4. Write a story from Delia’s perspective ten years later. Did she learn how to read? Did she pass the proficiency test? Did she stay in school? Is she still in contact with Yolanda and Randy?

Vocabulary Test

Circle the definition that best matches how the word is used in the novel.

_____1. menacing

- a. helpful
- b. threatening
- c. clinging
- d. loud

_____2. proficiency

- a. efficiency
- b. professional
- c. incompetence
- d. ability

_____3. overwhelmed

- a. weighed down
- b. jumped
- c. excited
- d. happy

_____4. compulsory

- a. optional
- b. completely
- c. required
- d. compliant

_____5. intricate

- a. complicated
- b. easy
- c. quiet
- d. silly

_____6. routine

- a. direction
- b. performance
- c. result
- d. score

_____7. flexibility

- a. muscularity
- b. ability
- c. suppleness
- d. rigid

_____8. potential

- a. untalented
- b. capacity
- c. strong
- d. polite

_____9. confrontation

- a. blame
- b. retreat
- c. change
- d. clash

_____10. capricious

- a. unpredictable
- b. jealous
- c. head gear
- d. zodiac sign

_____11. fretful

- a. delighted
- b. relaxed
- c. worried
- d. hateful

_____12. ominous

- a. knowledgeable
- b. gloomy
- c. cheerful
- d. promising

_____13. frustration

- a. irritation
- b. satisfaction
- c. evaluation
- d. success

_____14. admiration

- a. officer
- b. disregard
- c. scold
- d. approval

_____15. exultation

- a. sadness
- b. relief
- c. joy
- d. satisfaction

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify the person, place, action, or thing that matches the description.

- _____ 1. "I know you can't read, Delia. I've known for a long time."
- _____ 2. "Sometimes kids just make that stuff up 'cause it sounds gross."
- _____ 3. It was like an intricate dance with ropes and legs and jumping bodies.
- _____ 4. "It's not a lie if you really believe it, is it?"
- _____ 5. "They couldn't cope with their father's death."
- _____ 6. "I didn't need any help. I figured out how to beat the system."
- _____ 7. "From what I can see, all of you are excited about being afraid."
- _____ 8. "I hate funerals."
- _____ 9. "Ah, Mr. Youngblood, you have more valuables to offer me?"
- _____ 10. "At least I'm predictable!"
- _____ 11. A metal detector will be installed at the front door.
- _____ 12. "Home is safe. It's school I'm scared of."
- _____ 13. "I almost cost you the chance to get your daddy back."
- _____ 14. "It's the thunder and lightning and the thick, dark silences between each blast."
- _____ 15. "Everything changes, yet somehow things remain constant."

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Provide an answer to each of these questions.

1. What does Delia say whole pages look like when she tries to read them?
2. What does Yolanda specialize in?
3. What is it like when Titan and Tabu walk down the hallway?
4. What does Delia compare the proficiency test to?
5. What does Delia say jumping is like?
6. What does the tension in the gym sizzle like?
7. What book does Titan say is about the death of children?
8. What does Randy's father compare his appetite to?
9. What do the tapping of young feet and the rapping of twisted ropes on the floor build up?
10. Why doesn't Delia order the shrimp from the menu?

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

Fill in the words that complete each statement

1. Mrs. Tolliver goes on the _____ because she wants to _____ her sons.
2. Randy pawns his VCR in _____'s shop.
3. Two _____ hit the school.
4. Delia fears the _____ because she can't _____.
5. Randy is left alone for two _____.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. How does Delia's relationship with Yolanda and Randy make a difference in her life?
2. Analyze why Yolanda lies. Why does she tell tall tales? Is her character important to the story? Why?
3. Discuss the importance of Bomani in the story. What is his relationship to Randy?
4. Is this novel a good read for middle-school students? Why or why not?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

1. threatening
2. ability
3. weighed down
4. required
5. complicated
6. performance
7. suppleness
8. capacity
9. clash
10. unpredictable
11. worried
12. gloomy
13. irritation
14. approval
15. joy

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

1. Bomani
2. Yolanda
3. Delia
4. Bobby Brown
5. Miss Benson
6. Randy
7. Mr. Clifford
8. Misty
9. Randy
10. Yolanda
11. Mr. Lazarro
12. Jesse
13. Tolliver twins
14. Mr. Youngblood
15. Mrs. Parks

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

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

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

1. As in Western movies, the bad guys wear black hats and the good guys wear white hats. The Tolliver twins

want to enhance their reputation as bad guys, and they accomplish this by wearing all black. The twins appear more ominous in black, like the black clouds that precede the twisters.

2. Delia doesn't realize that the flyer is not a "wanted" poster. She thinks she is saving Randy from being hurt.

3. Yolanda lies because she is unhappy with her life at home. Her father is demanding and her mother drinks. Telling tall tales keeps her in the limelight and makes life more bearable. Yolanda doesn't consider her tall tales to be lies; she thinks they are harmless.

4. Randy is afraid to tell anyone the truth. He doesn't want Mr. Clifford to lose respect for his father. Randy fears being put in a foster home and getting his father in trouble with the law if anyone finds out his father left him alone.

5. Mrs. Tolliver is a single parent raising two boys whose reputations are menacing. She fears that she isn't doing enough for her boys, and worries that they have not fully recovered from their father's death. She agrees to do the show because the producers promise they will get psychological help for her boys if he does.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

1. Yolanda
2. Delia
3. Double Dutch
4. Yolanda
5. Mrs. Tolliver
6. Delia
7. Mrs. Parks
8. Officer Brown
9. Mr. Clifford
10. Yolanda
11. school
12. Randy
13. Delia
14. tornado
15. Bomani

Part II: Short Answers (20 points)

1. Martian
2. lying
3. the parting of the Red Sea
4. a runaway truck
5. magic
6. electrical lines
7. *Lord of the Flies*

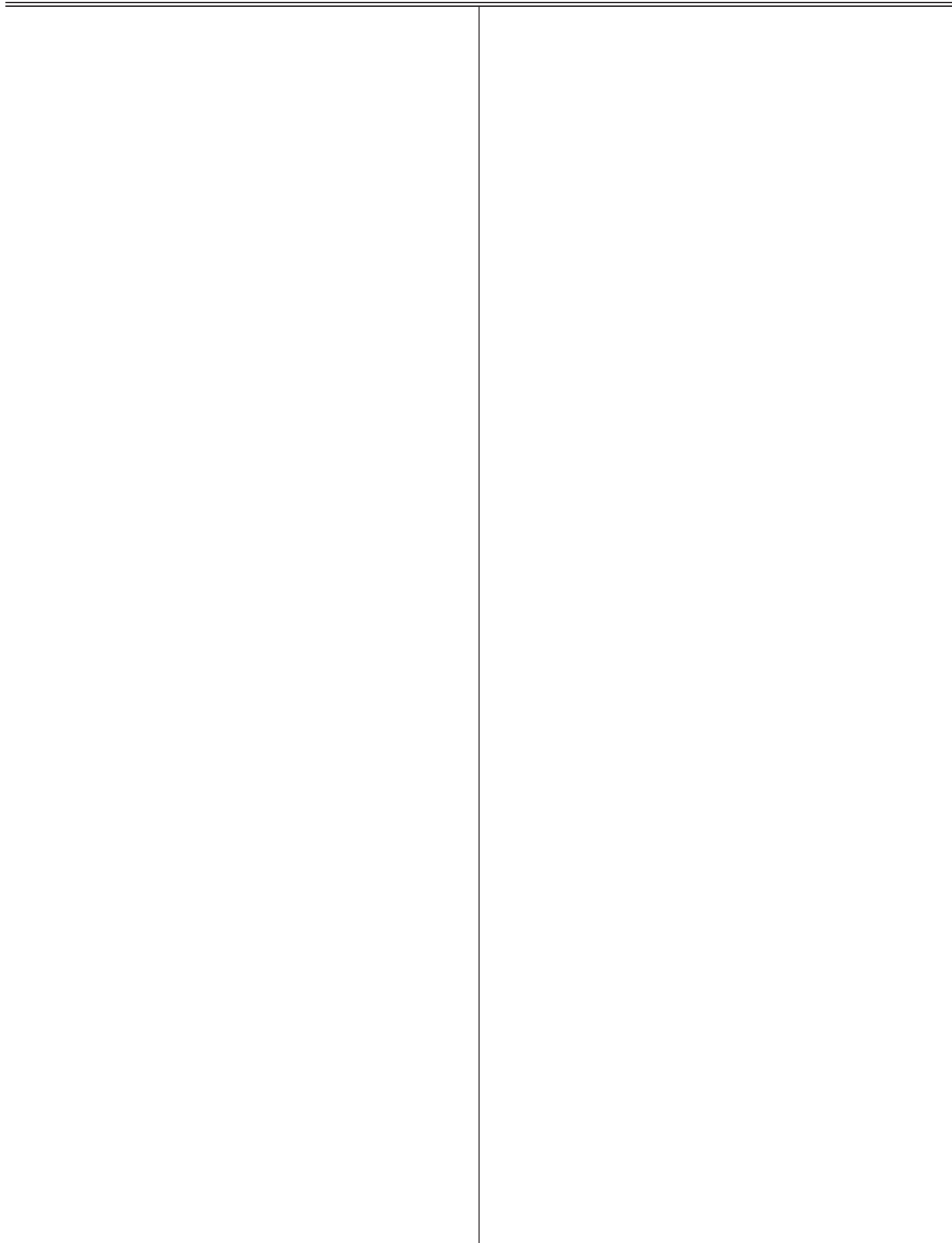
- 8. a gas-guzzling truck
- 9. syncopated rhythms of excitement
- 10. because the menu didn't have pictures

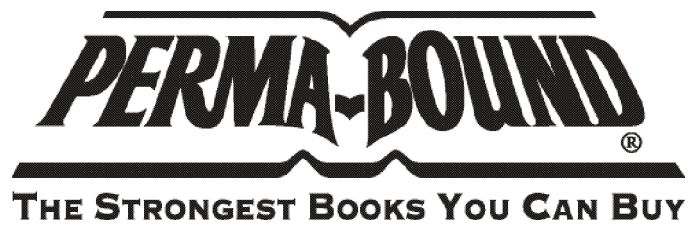
Part III: Fill-In (30 points)

- 1. talk show, help
- 2. Mr. Clifford
- 3. tornadoes
- 4. proficiency test, read
- 5. months

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.





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