



The Higher Power of Lucky

By Susan Patron

Teacher's Guide

Written by Kathy Sammis

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Synopsis

Chapter 1: Evesdropping

Ten-year-old Lucky Trimble lives in the tiny (pop. 43) high desert town of Hard Pan, California, with her French guardian Brigitte in a trio of attached trailers. As the novel opens, Lucky is eavesdropping as usual on an anonymous twelve-step program meeting. Lucky is fascinated with the stories of people hitting rock bottom and then finding their Higher Power to take control of their lives. She hopes to learn how to find her own Higher Power to guide her and help her get in control of her own life. She is listening now to her favorite recovering person's story, as Short Sammy relates his rock-bottom moment: falling dead drunk out of his parked car as a rattlesnake in the back seat bit his dog Roy in the scrotum. Inquisitive Lucky is quite curious about what a scrotum might be.

Chapters 2: Brigitte, Chapter 3: Good and Bad

Lucky's mother Lucille died two years ago when she stepped on a downed power line outside the trailers. Lucky's father has been absent since Lucky was a baby and he and Lucille were divorced (he never wanted children). When Lucille died, Lucky's father called his first wife, Brigitte, in France, and she immediately flew to California to look after Lucky. Now, two years later, Lucky sees how homesick Brigitte is, and she fears that Brigitte will soon abandon her and return to France.

Chapter 4: Graffit

Lucky, an aspiring scientist, has named her dog HMS Beagle in honor of Charles Darwin (the dog is "neither a ship nor a beagle," however). On Friday afternoon, Lucky and HMS Beagle meet Lucky's thoughtful best friend, Lincoln, by a road sign that Lincoln alters with a colon to read SLOW: CHILDREN AT PLAY. Lincoln doesn't talk

much; he's always busy tying knots. Lucky is very pleased when Lincoln comments favorably on her eyebrows, which are glistening thanks to discreet dabs of mineral oil.

Chapter 5: Miles

Back at the trailers, five-year-old Miles stops by. He is making his daily round of Hard Pan, mooching cookies. Lucky refuses to read to Miles yet again his much-loved, worn copy of *Are You My Mother?* But she does agree to tell him another Olden Days of Hard Pan story, featuring Chesterfield the wild burro and her heroic rescues.

Chapter 6: How Brigitte Came

When Brigitte comes home with this month's allotment of Government Surplus commodities, she agrees to tell Miles the story of how she came to Hard Pan. She arrived in a red silk dress and high heels, completely unprepared for the reality of barren desert life. She had planned to stay only until social services found a foster family for Lucky. Then Lucky's father (still absent) convinced Brigitte to become Lucky's official Guardian, so Brigitte is still

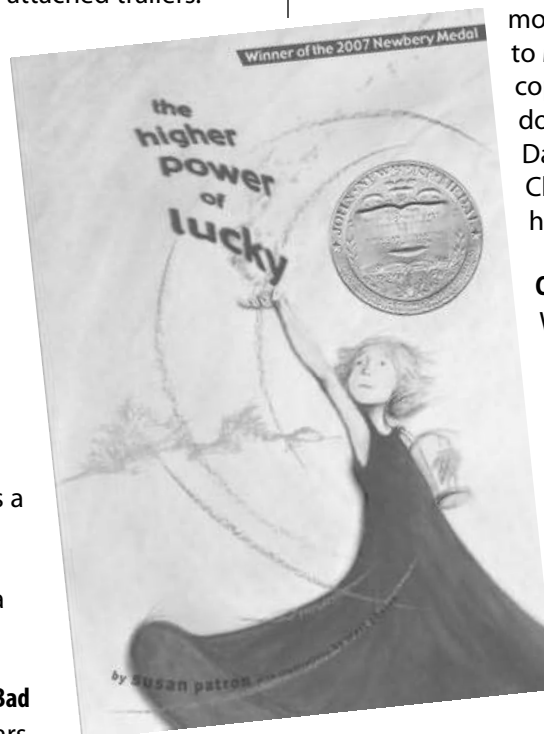
here.

Chapter 7: Tarantula Hawk Wasp, Chapter 8: Snake

In keeping with her plans to become a scientist, Lucky works on creating exhibits of the desert insect specimens she has collected. Brigitte is dismayed to find dead insects in the kitchen, again, just as she returns home with yet another stingy support check from Lucky's father (and no letter, as usual, for Lucky). Brigitte is then horrified to discover a snake in the dryer—something wrong, she says, that would never happen in France. Lucky can see that Hard Pan is pushing Brigitte away while France is calling her home.

Chapter 9: Short Sammy's

Lucky and Lincoln visit Short Sammy at his water-tank house, where he is cooking the Government Surplus



food in his usual way, with copious amounts of grease. When Lucky asks him if he would rather live in France or Hard Pan, Sammy tells the kids to look out the window at the desert landscape, rolling off to the foothills and mountains in the distance. Lucky has an insight: Hard Pan itself may be Short Sammy's Higher Power, life here being calming and slow-paced. Could Brigitte ever love Hard Pan as much as she loves France?

Chapter 10: The Urn

On Sunday morning, Lucky and Lincoln discuss their memories of the memorial service for Lucille two years ago. Lucky had been unable to bring herself to fling her mother's ashes away; they are still in the urn in the trailer. Lucky is shocked when Lincoln reveals that her father was at the service; he did not even approach her. Lincoln comforts her in just the right way: he gives her a large, beautiful, complex Ten-Strand Round knot. Lucky wishes that she could organize all the complicated strands of her life into such a beautiful, neat knot.

Chapter 11: Smokers Anonymous

Eavesdropping at a smokers' anonymous meeting, Lucky discovers that Miles is living with his grandmother because his mother is in jail, not because she is taking care of a sick friend in Florida, which is what Miles has been told.

Chapters 12: Parsley, Chapter 13: Bisous

Lucky discovers that Brigitte has taken her suitcase out of the bedroom closet; in it are a sheaf of papers and Brigitte's passport, which is usually in a safe-deposit box in Sierra City. Lucky realizes that Brigitte is about to abandon her. She decides to take control of her life by running away, holing up in one of the abandoned mining dugouts for a while. She is confirmed in this decision when she sees that Brigitte is taking an online French course in restaurant management. Clearly, Brigitte is going to go back to France and run a restaurant.

Chapter 14: The First Sign, Chapter 15: The Second Sign and the Third Sign

Lucky gets Three Signs telling her that Monday is the perfect day to run away. First, she and Lincoln eye-smile on the school bus, showing that they know what each other is thinking. Second, during science class, Lucky realizes that with her all-over sandy coloring, she is perfectly adapted to her desert environment. Third, school lets out early because of a coming dust storm.

Chapter 16: Getting Ready to Run Away

At home, Lucky makes a final inventory of the contents of her always-with-her survival backpack, now enhanced with running-away items, plus the urn with her mother's remains. Pesky Miles appears; Lucky drives him away by saying that his mother is in jail, and she's not his mother, and she won't take care of him. He runs out into the storm, crying. At the last minute, Lucky slips into Brigitte's red silk dress, and suddenly thinks of Lincoln, which confuses her.

Chapter 17: HMS Beagle Disobeys

Lucky and HMS Beagle struggle through the raging storm. The dog stops at a pile of rags and refuses to go on. Lucky continues, struggling with her heavy backpack, and reaches the abandoned mining cave. Reluctantly, she goes back out into the storm to retrieve HMS Beagle, and discovers that the pile of rags is actually Miles.

Chapter 18: Cholla Burr, Chapter 19: Eggs and Beans, Chapter 20: A Good Book

Lucky carries Miles back to the dugout. Feeling grown-up and maybe even a bit pretty in the red silk dress, Lucky calmly cares for Miles and reassures him. When she gets a moth in her ear, she has Miles help distract her by reading his copy of *Are You My Mother?* to her; she had added the book to her backpack's contents. After reading, Miles talks about his own mother; it's better that she's in jail, because "that means she's not staying away from me on purpose."

Chapter 21: Amazing Grace

Lincoln arrives at the dugout and then, later, the townspeople who have been searching for the missing children. Stepping out of the dugout, Lucky announces, "Thank you for coming to this memorial service for my mother." As everyone sings "Amazing Grace," Lucky—feeling that she is being guided by her Higher Power—flings her mother's remains up into a breeze that carries them away "into the great waiting desert."

Chapter 22: Bonne Nuit

As Brigitte hugs Lucky at bedtime back at the trailers, we learn that Brigitte had her passport and other papers ready for proceedings for her to legally adopt Lucky. The restaurant management course is to open a café in Hard Pan, with a loan from Lucky's father. Snuggled securely in Brigitte's loving arms, Lucky shows that she now fully trusts Brigitte by asking her what a scrotum is. In this intimate scene, Brigitte, in turn, shows her love for and bond with Lucky by answering in a sim-

ple and straightforward manner.

Chapter 23: By and By

Some time has passed. Brigitte's Hard Pan Café is a great success, drawing tourists and geologists as well as townspeople. Lucky feels she has done a good job in plugging up the hole in the wall where the twelve-step meetings take place. Not a sound emerges from inside any more.

Timeline of the Action

two years ago

Lucky's mother died in a freak accident; Brigitte came from France to care for Lucky.

Friday

Lucky eavesdrops again, trying to find out how to access her Higher Power.

Saturday

Lucky tells Miles the story about Chesterfield the burro; Lucky and Lincoln visit Short Sammy.

Sunday

Lucky and Lincoln talk about the memorial service two years earlier. Lucky discovers Brigitte's passport packed in Brigitte's suitcase; Lucky decides to run away.

Monday

Angry, Lucky drives Miles away. Lucky runs away into the dust storm, then goes back to rescue Miles. The Hard Pan rescuers arrive, and Lucky releases her mother's ashes into the wind.

Monday night

Lucky learns that Brigitte loves her and is going to adopt her.

Author Sketch

Susan Patron was born in 1948 in Los Angeles, California, and grew up in a middle-class section of Hollywood, the middle child of three sisters. She fell in love with storytelling at a young age, telling tales to her younger sister. At the age of eight, Susan was so moved by Charlotte's Web that she determined to become a writer. She earned a B.A. in English literature from Pitzer College and a master's degree in Library and Information Science from Immaculate Heart College. She then, in 1972, became a children's librarian for the Los Angeles Public Library system, eventually moving up to the position of the LAPL's Juvenile Materials Collection Development Manager. She retired



from the LAPL in 2007 and now focuses full-time on her writing career. She and her long-time husband René Patron (a rare-book restorer) have a home in Hollywood and a no-frills cabin in California's high desert in a former mining town that serves as a model for Hard Pan. Prior to *Lucky*, Patron had published four picture books and one middle-grade reader. Despite her earlier publishing and writing success, Patron encountered severe writer's block while working on *Lucky*, which took her ten years to complete. It was only after her own mother's death that she found the emotional core around which to center Lucky's story.

Critic's Corner

Lucky garnered so little critical notice that Patron decided to stop working on its sequel and give up writing. Then came the Newbery phone call. Patron immediately told her husband that she was going to be a writer again. Once the book was in the spotlight, some librarians noticed, and took umbrage at Patron's use of the word *scrotum* on page 1 (the reference being to a rattlesnake biting a pet dog's scrotum). A widespread Web and print media discussion about this sprang up, which catapulted the novel to best-seller status. Critics were unconcerned about the use of the s-word. *Kirkus Reviews* remarked on Lucky's "remarkable story" and added, "Readers will gladly give themselves over to Patron, a master of light but sure characterization and closely observed detail. A small gem." *Booklist* wrote, "Patron's plotting is as tight as her characters are endearing. Lucky is a true heroine, especially because she's not perfect." *School Library Journal* evaluated, "This character-driven novel has an unusually complicated back story and a fair amount of exposition. Yet, its quirky cast and local color help to balance this fact, and the desert setting is fascinating. . . . Lucky's struggle to come to terms with her mother's death and with her new life ring true."

Selected Other Works by Susan Patron

Burgoo Stew (1991)
Five Bad Boys, Billy Que, and the Dustdobbin (1992)
Bobbin Dustdobbin (1992)
Dark Cloud Strong Breeze (1994)
Maybe Yes, Maybe No, Maybe Maybe (1993)

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- "Here's Why It's Censorship" (Editorial), *The Horn Book Magazine*, May/June 2007, p. 228
- "IRA Members Served on Committee that Chose *Lucky*: Opinions on 'the Word' Run the Gamut," *Reading Today*, June/July 2007, p. 29
- Jackson, Richard, "Ten," *The Horn Book Magazine*, July/August 2007, pp. 339–41
- Nelson, Sara, "Lacking Cojones," *Publishers Weekly*, February 19, 2007, p. 3
- "Newbery Winner Spawns Controversy" (includes author interview), *Reading Today*, June/July 2007, p. 28
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- Oleck, Joan, "SLJ Catches Up with Newbery Winner Susan Patron," *School Library Journal*, May 9, 2007
- Patron, Susan, "Newbery Medal Acceptance Speech," *Children and Libraries*, Summer/Fall 2007, pp. 6–9
- Something About the Author*, Vol. 182. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2008
- "Susan Patron's Response," *Publishers Weekly*, February 15, 2007
- Walter, Virginia A., "Susan Patron," *The Horn Book Magazine*, July/August 2007, pp. 337–39
- Whelan, Dehra, Lau, "Hitting Below the Belt?" *School Library Journal*, March 2007, p. 16
- "Writing for the Inner Child," *Washington Post*, January 29, 2007, p. C12

Reviews of *The Higher Power of Lucky*

- Booklist*, December 1, 2006, p. 48; April 15, 2007, p. 61
- The Horn Book Magazine*, January/February 2007, p. 71
- Kirkus Reviews*, October 15, 2006, p. 1077; December 1, 2006, p. 12
- Publishers Weekly*, February 12, 2007, pp. 88–89
- School Library Journal*, December 2006, p. 152; May 2007, p. 71

Internet Sites for Susan Patron

- "Author Interview: Susan Patron on *The Higher Power of Lucky*":
cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com/2007/12/author-interview-susan-patron-on-higher.html
- "Author Susan Patron Gets Bitten by Success":
seattlepi.nwsourc.com/books/311242_patron12.html
- "Conversation: Robie H. Harris and Susan Patron":
www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/1607/prml

D/1502

- "CSL Connection Interview with California's Susan Patron": www.library.ca.gov/newsletter/2007/2007fall/patron.html
- "One-on-One with Award-Winning Children's Writer and AFSCME Member Susan Patron":
www.afscme.org/publications/14660.cfm
- "Susan Patron Interview": alfocus.ala.org/videos/susan-patron-interview

General Objectives

1. To explore the feelings and coping process involved in the loss of a significant person in your life
2. To consider the ways in which bonds of friendship and love develop and provide strength to individuals
3. To think about the important role pets can play in a person's life
4. To recognize the ways that life in an isolated desert community can affect its residents
5. To talk about the important roles that parents and parent figures play in a young person's life, and the effects on a young person of the absence of any such people
6. To consider the ways in which a young person can begin to take control of his or her life

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the reasons why Brigitte is living with Lucky in Hard Pan, and the role that Brigitte plays in Lucky's life
2. To understand the sources of Lucky's fears and anxieties
3. To recognize the roles that the various inhabitants of Hard Pan play in Lucky's life
4. To identify the rewards and challenges of living in Hard Pan's desert environment
5. To trace the theme of absent parents and abandonment issues as they affect different characters in the novel
6. To understand Lucky's motivations for carrying her survival backpack with her at all times, and her motivations for running away
7. To analyze the effect that her running-away experience has had on Lucky
8. To come to an understanding about the Higher Power that Lucky is searching for

Literary Terms and Applications

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

Chapter book: a children's book, usually fiction, of moderate length, not too complex, and divided into short chapters, for readers about seven to ten years old, or somewhat older reluctant readers. The Higher Power of Lucky matches this description.

Coming-of-age novel or Bildungsroman: a work of fiction in which the main character moves into and/or through adolescence and develops at least the beginnings of maturity. In this novel, ten-year-old Lucky takes early steps toward maturity as she struggles to come to terms with her mother's death, to take some control of her life, and to feel secure and loved with Brigitte.

Protagonist: the main character in a play or novel. Lucky is this novel's protagonist, with the focus on her struggles to resolve her feelings of abandonment and her fears about her future living arrangements.

Setting: the time and place in which the action of a story takes place. The high California desert setting is an integral part of this novel, shaping the lifestyles of Hard Pan's inhabitants. Author Susan Patron has said that the desert is itself a character in the book; as she developed her concept for the novel, the desert came first, and then a ten-year-old girl having to fit her life into that environment.

Symbol: an element in a literary work that stands for something else. In this novel, for example, Lucky's wearing of Brigitte's red silk dress symbolizes that as Lucky attempts to sort through her confused emotions and understandings, she is going through a process of preparing to grow up, teetering toward oncoming adolescence and womanhood.

The Importance of Setting

The basic setting is the high California desert and the town of Hard Pan in the middle of that desert. Author Susan Patron has said that the desert itself is a character in the novel. It imposes difficult living conditions on the townspeople of Hard Pan, including extreme heat, scarce water, and ever-present dust. The town is sparse and tiny, a "jumble of trailers, sheds, outhouses, shacks, and rusty vehicles." Lucky and Brigitte live in a half-circle of three small, connected trailers at the edge of town. But as Lucky observes, the vast surrounding desert is also comforting and beautiful and peaceful, cupped protectively by the Coso Range in the distance, crowned by an endless sky. The people who live here

are adaptable, quirky survivors.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Kate DiCamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*
 Karen Hesse, *Out of the Dust*
 Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*
 Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*
 Katherine Patterson, *The Great Gilly Hopkins*
 Phyllis Naylor Reynolds, *The Agony of Alice*
 Louis Sachar, *Holes*
 Ouida Sebestyen, *Out of Nowhere*
 Zilpha Keatly Snyder, *The Runaways*
 Jerry Spinelli, *Maniac Magee*
 Ruth White, *Belle Prater's Boy*

Nonfiction

Jan Adkins, *String: Tying It Up, Tying It Down*
 Caroline Arnold, *Watching Desert Wildlife*
 Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Dog* (Eyewitness Books)
 Ann Heinrichs, *California* (America the Beautiful Series)
 Macquitty, Miranda, *Desert* (Eyewitness Books)
 Eric E. Rofes, ed., *The Kids' Book About Death and Dying by and for Kids*
 Alvin and Virginia Silverstein, *Dogs: All About Them*
 Barbara Taylor, *Desert Life*
 Charles A. Wills, *A Historical Album of California*

CD-ROM

Microsoft Dogs (Microsoft Corp.)
Exploring Land Habitats (Steck-Vaughn)
Weather Science Explorer (New Media Schoolhouse)

Internet

"California's Untold Stories: Gold Rush!" www.museum-ca.org/goldrush
 "Death and Grief":
www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/someone_died.html
 "Desert" (ThinkQuest):
library.thinkquest.org/28855/geography.html
 "Deserts Field Trip" (Virtual Field Trips): www.field-guides.com/sci/desert/index.htm
 "The Digital Desert": aeve.com/digitaldesert/ddad/ddinfo.html
 "Ghost Town Explorers: California Desert Regions":
www.ghosttownexplorers.org/ghostdes.htm
 "International Guild of Knot Tyers: Beginners":
www.igkt.net/beginners/index.php
 "Newbery Medal Home Page":

www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawards/newberymdeal/newberymedal.cfm

"Oatman and the Wild Burros":

www.desertusa.com/video_pages/oatman_movie.html

"When Somebody Dies":

kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/somedie.htm

Video/DVD

American Deserts (Environmental Media/Snyder Prods.)

Desert (Eyewitness Living Earth Series) (DK Multimedia/BBC Worldwide Americas)

Desert Animals (Amazing Animals Series) (Partridge Films & DK Vision)

Desert Biomes: Essential and Endangered (Cochran Communications/Rainbow Educational Media)

Dog (Eyewitness Video) (DK Vision)

The Newbery Award (International Reading Assn.)

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Higher Power of Lucky* should include these aspects.

Themes

- fear of abandonment
- absent parents
- accidental death and the ensuing grief
- need for love, family, and security
- taking control of your life
- quest for personal strength
- child's need for information about the world
- small-town values
- adapting to your environment

Motifs

- Higher Power and rock bottom
- desert life
- addiction
- red silk dress
- scientific inquiry
- storytelling
- government surplus food
- Charles Darwin
- wild burros
- abandoned mines
- survival backpack

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a par-

ticular meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the chapter and page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. Lucky had been eavesdropping at the anonymous twelve-step meetings. (Ch. 1, p. 7)
(Lucky is secretly listening in on the addiction-recovery meetings and the stories that people tell there. The people who are at the meetings are supposed to be anonymous, that is, they do not reveal their names or who they are. But in a town as tiny as Hard Pan, it's unlikely that anyone is actually anonymous. Still, it's an ethical violation for Lucky to listen in.)
2. Short Sammy's story, of all the rock-bottom stories Lucky had heard at twelve-step anonymous meetings, was her favorite. (Ch. 1, p. 1)
(To hit rock bottom means to arrive at the lowest level, in a physical, financial, or emotional way. Individual recovering addicts tell the story of the moment when they hit rock bottom and thus started on their process of recovery. Lucky later feels that she has hit rock bottom when she discovers what she thinks is positive proof of Brigitte's soon-to-be-acted-on intent to return to France.)
3. A little breeze had come up by the time Lucky got home to the half circle of trailers.
(A trailer, technically, is a mobile home, a dwelling that is designed to be movable, attached to and trailed behind a truck. Lucky and Brigitte live in three connected trailers. These trailers, like many "mobile" homes, are set permanently on their site on concrete-block foundations. Trailers are a widely used form of affordable housing.)
4. Lucky hoisted her backpack off the floor and plopped it beside her on the banquette.
(A banquette is a long upholstered bench. With space at a premium in mobile homes, which are typically not very wide and rely on space-saving built-in features, banquettes are common.)
5. Lucky's mother stepped on a downed power line, was electrocuted, and died.
(Electrocuted means "killed by electric shock." Lucky's mother stepped outside the morning after a storm and didn't notice that the storm had caused a live power line to fall down. Touching a power line that still has electricity running through it will cause a fatal current of electricity to run through a person's body.)

6. Lincoln had learned to tie about a million different knots, plus bends and hitches.
(Bends and hitches are different types of knots. A bend is a knot that fastens one rope to another or to an object. A hitch is a knot used to make a temporary noose in a line or to secure a line temporarily to an object. Suggest that students who elect to take up the knot-tying Student Involvement Activity include demonstrations of bends and hitches.)
7. Brigitte came in carrying two sacks of Government Surplus commodities.
(The United States government gives some food away to people who need it. In the case of Hard Pan, the U.S. Department of Agriculture gives commodities—food produced by agriculture—free to people who are in need. Most of the people who live in Hard Pan get this free food once a month, a sign that most of Hard Pan’s inhabitants have low income.)
8. “Hard Pan, Pop. 43”
(This is a road sign that announces what town drivers are entering and how many people live in the town. “Pop.” is an abbreviation of “Population.” The sign that Hard Pan has a Pop. of 43 tells us how tiny the town is.)
9. “This urn contains your mother’s remains.”
(An urn is an ornamental vase often used for holding the ashes of people who have died—the “remains”—and have been cremated.)
10. . . . the crematory man (p. 67)
(Cremation is the process of burning a dead body down to ashes. A crematory is a furnace in which cremation takes place.)
11. Brigitte’s passport was in the suitcase.
(A passport is a document given to a person by the government of her or his country. It proves that the person is a citizen of that country. You need a passport to travel from your country to other countries. When Lucky sees Brigitte’s passport in Brigitte’s suitcase, Lucy concludes that Brigitte is planning to abandon her and return to France.)
12. “We need to show the judge my green card.”
(A green card is an identity card that is proof that a person who is not a citizen of the United States has official permission to live in the United States permanently. Brigitte, a citizen of France, has been able to live in the United States these past two years

because she has a green card.

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.

Literal Level (Questions 1-4)

1. Why is Brigitte living with Lucky in Hard Pan?
(Lucky’s mother Lucille died in a freak accident two years ago. Rather than care for his child himself, or even put in an appearance, Lucky’s father immediately called Brigitte, his first wife, in France. He had already booked an overnight flight from Paris to Los Angeles for her, knowing that she would come. Brigitte had planned to stay only until social services could find a foster family for Lucky. When no appropriate placement could be found, Lucky’s father maneuvered Brigitte into becoming Lucky’s court-appointed Guardian. Brigitte accepted this situation and has stayed on, but Lucky does not trust that Brigitte will continue to stay rather than return to her beloved France.)
2. What part does each of these characters play in Lucky’s everyday life: Brigitte, Lincoln, Miles, Short Sammy, and HMS Beagle?
(Brigitte is Lucky’s loving and devoted guardian, who provides a secure home for Lucky, although Lucky doesn’t realize the degree of that love and devotion and security. Lincoln is Lucky’s best friend. Lucky feels that they understand each other perfectly, and she is beginning to have early romantic feelings about him. Miles is a mostly cheerful, insistent little boy. Lucky mostly humors him with cookies, stories, and readings of Are You My Mother? but she also finds him pesky and annoying. Short Sammy is an adult whom Lucky can talk to about almost anything. Lucky also hopes to gain some insight from Sammy on how to find her Higher Power, since he has found his. HMS Beagle is Lucky’s devoted dog/companion who helps soothe her fears of abandonment.)
3. Describe life in Hard Pan.
(Hard Pan is in the high California desert. It is dusty and dry and very, very hot during the time that the novel’s events take place. Water and air conditioning are in short supply. The town is “a jumble of trailers,

sheds, outhouses, shacks, and rusty vehicles" [with a beautiful desert landscape rolling out all around it]. Life in Hard Pan is both a struggle to cope with the desert environment and a struggle to survive economically. The town has only three paying jobs, two of them part-time. The townspeople mostly all rely on monthly Government Surplus food handouts. The characters we meet are all quirky, hanging on to life in Hard Pan for their own reasons. The town has an extraordinary number of twelve-step programs, considering the population of only forty-three. Any "outside world" activities require a fifty-mile one-way drive to Sierra City.)

4. What signs convince Lucky that Brigitte is going to leave her and return to France?

(Lucky notices many signs that Brigitte is homesick for France. She talks often on the phone with her mother in Paris, who wants Brigitte to come back. Brigitte cries when she opens little packages of favorite French things that her mother has sent, like a special French mustard and the parsley grater. The desert environment of Hard Pan is harsh, very unlike France, and Brigitte dislikes the intense heat, the insects, and snakes in the dryer! Brigitte seems far away as she listens to recordings of sad and beautiful French songs. Finally, Lucky sees Brigitte's passport in her suitcase and learns that Brigitte is taking a French course in restaurant management.)

Interpretive Level (Questions 5–8)

5. How do absent parents and abandonment issues affect different characters in the novel?

(Lucky feels doubly abandoned—her father has always been absent, even when her mother died, so her mother's death has left her essentially parentless. Since Brigitte is only her guardian, not her mother, and clearly is homesick for France, Lucky fears dreadfully that Brigitte will soon abandon her too. Brigitte, for her part, misses her mother in Paris, as shown by their frequent phone calls. Miles makes the rounds of Hard Pan every day, seeking surrogate parenting. He feels abandoned by his mother, believing that she has chosen to leave him to care for a sick friend. He shows his insecurities about his absent mother by carrying the book Are You My Mother? with him everywhere, often imploring Lucky to read it to him.)

6. What is in Lucky's survival backpack? What are her practical and emotional reasons for carrying it with her at all times?

(Lucky carries practical necessities in her backpack

for carrying out her scientific studies and for surviving if you get lost or stuck out in the desert. Specimen boxes, mineral oil, and nail polish remover are very important for collecting interesting spiders and insects, for example. Things to eat and drink and stay warm with are important for physical survival. Lucky carries the survival backpack for emotional reasons, too. Her mother's sudden death has filled Lucky with the feeling that terrible things can happen to you at any time. A well-equipped survival kit might help you get through when these bad things strike. When Lucky runs away, she adds items to her backpack that will help her emotionally—a twelve-step book, her mother's urn, a comforting brand-new toothbrush. In the end, Lucky discovers that no survival kit will really help you survive, but love will.)

7. What effects has her mother's sudden death had on Lucky?

(Lucky feels abandoned by both of her parents, so she intensely fears that Brigitte will abandon her, too. She feels that big and terrible things can happen to you at any time, out of the blue; she no longer has any sense of security about her life. In fact, she now feels that she has no control over her life. In part, this is because she is a child and adults are in charge, and they can abandon her. In part, this is also because she has not yet been able to find her Higher Power, which the anonymous recovering addicts say they have used to take control of their lives.)

8. Why does Lucky run away? How does the experience help her to resolve her conflicts and fears?

(Lucky figures that running away will stop Brigitte from leaving for France right away. She also sees it as a way of taking control of her life, removing herself from adults who are in charge. If she runs away, the police and her father and other officials will talk with Brigitte about "doing her Guardian job a little better." Lucky likes the idea that by running away she can make people do things they wouldn't do otherwise. The experience of rescuing and caring for Miles, while wearing the red silk dress, makes Lucky feel grown-up and competent and in control. The rescuers' outpouring of concern and love give Lucky a sense of security and trust, and she finally feels her Higher Power guiding her to the right decision about her mother's remains.)

Critical Level (Questions 9–11)

9. What is the "Higher Power" Lucky is searching for?
(Lucky has overheard the anonymous recovering

addicts speak about finding their Higher Power and using it to take control of their lives and addictions. Lucky feels that she has no control over her life. The Higher Power she seeks would be a sense that would help her make the right choices to guide her life in the best direction—to take control of and change her life, to reinvent herself. It would give her special insight into how the world works, and why bad things happen, and how to keep them from happening. In order to find this Higher Power, you have to do a complete and honest self-evaluation. When Lucky realizes that the right moment has come to scatter her mother’s ashes, she finally feels in touch with her Higher Power.)

10. Why does Lucky wear Brigitte’s red silk dress when she runs away?
(Lucky acts on impulse. When she puts on the dress, she feels more womanly, more mature, more in control. Her sense of this is confirmed when Miles says that she looks pretty and “kind of . . . grown up.” Lucky’s urge to wear the red silk dress is spurred by her desire to take control of her life by running away, by becoming more adult.)
11. In your opinion, does the name Lucky match what has happened to Lucky so far in life?
(Answers will vary. Lucky has been unlucky because her father has always been absent in her life and her mother was killed in a sudden, freak accident. Since she is effectively parentless, her future seems insecure. Brigitte struggles to make ends meet financially. On the other hand, Lucky is in fact lucky to have had Brigitte take on the role of guardian and provide a physically and emotionally secure home so that Lucky can remain living in a familiar environment that she loves, with her faithful dog/companion, among good friends and supportive neighbors.)

Creative Level (Questions 12–13)

12. Write a series of letters from Brigitte to her mother, or a series of journal entries, describing the unfamiliar and surprising aspects of her life in Hard Pan and the development of her relationship with Lucky.
13. Before reading the novel, make a prediction about events and issues in the novel based on the cover art. Use details of the art to explain your predictions. After you have read the novel, revise your predictions needed and re-explain the cover art.

Across the Curriculum

Science

1. Create an illustrated field guide to the snakes or the insects of California’s high desert region.
2. Collect specimens of some type of flora or fauna that interests you. Then create a science-museum-type exhibit of your specimens, as Lucky does for her tarantula hawk wasp.
3. Create a poster showing the cholla burr and its parent plant, with text and labels giving scientific information about both.
4. Create a multimedia presentation on the different planet-and-moon(s) combinations in our planetary system. Or create a presentation on how Earth would be affected if our moon were different—for example, in the ways that Lucky imagines on page 127 of the novel.

Geography

1. Use context clues found in the novel as well as your own research to locate on a map of California a likely location for the town of Hard Pan. Explain your choice of location.
2. Create a multimedia presentation on the ecology of California’s high desert region.

Mathematics

1. Develop a chart showing the typical range of temperatures in your area in both degrees centigrade and degrees Fahrenheit.

Language Arts

1. Read the book *Are You My Mother?* aloud to a group of young students. Report on their responses to the book.
2. Name a book that was one of your very favorites when you were about Miles’s age. Orally or in writing, explain why that book was your favorite at that time in your life.
3. Copy pages 45 and 46 of the novel, and then correct the errors in Lucky’s tarantula hawk wasp descriptions.
4. In class, discuss other Newbery Medal-winning books you have read, and generate a list of qualities you think help a book win the Newbery award. Then nominate a favorite book for the Newbery, citing the characteristics you think make it deserving of the award.
5. Reread the description of the storm and its aftermath on page 16 of the novel. Notice how the author uses words about senses—sight, hearing, sound,

and touch. Then write your own description of a weather event and its aftermath using a number of sensory words.

Social Studies

1. Discuss with classmates the First Amendment right of freedom of speech and how it applies to efforts to ban some books from schools and public libraries. You could make a classroom or hallway display of the covers of some books that you and classmates may be familiar with that have been the subjects of banning efforts.
2. Research and report on the guardian and foster care system in your state.
3. Create a multimedia presentation or a written, illustrated report on Charles Darwin and his voyage aboard the HMS Beagle.
4. Research and report on the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and its wild burro program.

Art

1. Make a model of Lucky and Brigitte's three-trailer home.
2. Discuss with classmates how you think Matt Phelan's illustrations enhance (or do not enhance) the text of the novel.
3. Find other books that Matt Phelan has illustrated, and talk with classmates about how Phelan uses similar and different styles to illustrate different types of books. You could create a class display of some of these books.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Spend some time collecting found objects that would make a sound when struck together. Then make a wind chime using these found objects. You and your classmates could then turn your classroom into a temporary Found Object Wind Chime Museum.
2. Suppose you had a survival backpack, as Lucky does. Make a list of the things you would always carry with you in your survival kit. Compare and discuss lists with classmates.
3. Lucky has many anxious thoughts and questions about life. Write about your anxious thoughts and questions in your personal journal. If you feel comfortable doing so, share what you have written with a trusted adult.
4. Lucky considers that she has a "meanness gland" that causes her to lash out at Miles sometimes. Do you

feel the same way about yourself? Think about this, and then discuss with classmates or friends or family members.

5. Learn to tie a number of different knots. (Look this up on the Internet or in a library book.) Once you have become skilled, demonstrate to classmates how to tie the various knots.
6. Research the profession of children's librarian. Find out what skills and qualifications a person needs to become a children's librarian, and what the job duties and possibilities are. Then decide if you might be interested in this career path.
7. With classmates, act out favorite scenes from the novel, such as the snake-in-the-dryer incident, or Lucky and Miles struggling through the dust storm.
8. Find a parsley grinder and demonstrate to classmates how to use it.
9. Arrange for a local power-company representative to give a presentation to your class about power-line safety.

Alternate Assessment

1. Draw up a detailed character list for the novel under two headings, major characters and minor characters. List each character's name, give a brief character description (for those you have enough information about), and tell what role she or he plays in Lucky's life.
2. Individually or with classmates, create a skit in which a judge holds a hearing on Brigitte's application to adopt Lucky. Have Brigitte, Lucky, and Lucky's father testify, as well as the other residents of Hard Pan. A social worker could add her or his input.
3. Create a cause-and-effect diagram that explains the causes for Lucky's various anxieties and fears—for example, death of mother —> feeling of abandonment.
4. Create a web diagram with the central oval or square labeled "Signs that Brigitte plans to leave." Fill in the surrounding ovals or squares with all the signs Lucky notices that she thinks mean that Brigitte is going to leave her and return to France.

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. sample | f. wise about the world | k. horrible, disgusting |
| b. complicated | g. adjusted to surroundings | l. narrow openings |
| c. staggered | h. stared with anger | m. small ornaments |
| d. sparkle, shine | i. drooping with tiredness | n. very necessary |
| e. small amount | j. related to cooking | o. characteristics |

- _____ 1. Lucky thought of a question that Short Sammy's story had lodged into one of her brain crevices.
- _____ 2. When Lucky envisioned her perfect mother, she kept thinking of traits and habits like Brigitte's.
- _____ 3. Dabbing a tiny bit of mineral oil on her eyebrows made them glisten so you could at least see them.
- _____ 4. Lucky measured the wasp specimen head to tail.
- _____ 5. Lucky admired snakes because they were very, very highly adapted to their habitat.
- _____ 6. Lucky felt very wonderful about chasing the snake away without killing it in a gruesome way.
- _____ 7. One of the only paying jobs in Hard Pan was at Dot's Baubles 'n' Beauty Salon.
- _____ 8. Lincoln's Ten-Strand Round knot looked like a piece of jewelry, intricate and beautiful.
- _____ 9. To Brigitte, parsley was essential.
- _____ 10. Certified Course in Restaurant Management and Administration with Diploma from the Culinary Institute of France in Paris
- _____ 11. Sandi, the bus driver, glowered at Lucky. She looked at her wrist watch and shook her head.
- _____ 12. Wearing the silk dress turned Lucky into someone else, someone beautiful and sophisticated.
- _____ 13. As Lucky lurched to her feet, the whole weight of the backpack seemed to shift and she lost her balance and fell backward.
- _____ 14. Miles dipped the spoon and squeezed a large dollop of ketchup on his hand.
- _____ 15. Lucky felt sleepy and languid in Brigitte's arms.

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. You will use each name only once.

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| a. Lucky | e. Lucky's father | h. Chesterfield |
| b. Lincoln | f. Lucky's mother | i. Short Sammy |
| c. Miles | g. HMS Beagle | j. Brigitte |
| d. Roy | | |

- _____ 1. Dies the morning after a rainstorm.
- _____ 2. Lives in the wild with others of her kind.
- _____ 3. Goes all over town every day asking for cookies.
- _____ 4. Arranges for Brigitte to come to Hard Pan.
- _____ 5. Lives in a water-tank house.
- _____ 6. Plans to become a world-famous scientist.
- _____ 7. Kills a rattlesnake in the back seat of a car.
- _____ 8. Says, "Oh, la-la, la-LAH, la-LAH," when very annoyed.
- _____ 9. Is Lucky's best friend.
- _____ 10. Is the first to find Miles during the dust storm.

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

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

- 1 Lucky and her neighbors live in the U.S. state of _____.
2. Brigitte flew from her home country of _____ to care for Lucky.
3. Lucky has a job sweeping the patio of the _____ Wind Chime Museum and Visitor Center.
4. Lincoln belongs to the International Guild of _____.
5. Lucky and Brigitte live in a connected set of three _____.
6. Lucky uses nail polish remover to kill _____.
7. Short Sammy is a recovering _____.
8. Brigitte is horrified when she discovers a(n) _____ in the clothes dryer.
9. Most people in town get a handout of _____ food once a month.
10. Lucky's town sits in the middle of a rolling _____ environment.
11. Lucky is shocked when Lincoln tells her that _____ attended the memorial service two years ago.
12. When Lucky runs away, she wears Brigitte's _____.
13. Lucky and Miles put themselves in danger by running away during a(n) _____.
14. Lucky discovers that Brigitte has been taking an online course about _____ management.
15. The name of Brigitte's successful new business is the Hard Pan _____.

Part III. Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. (Brigitte, Dot, Lucille, Susan) is the name of Lucky's mother.
2. Lucky's last name is (Trimble, Kennedy, Prender, Carter).
3. The population of Hard Pan is (33, 43, 67, 143).
4. Bisous are (burros, fleas, jewelry, kisses).
5. Lucky's father lives in (Hard Pan, San Francisco, Sierra City, Paris).
6. Miles lives with his (mother, guardian, grandmother, parents).
7. The trip to school on the bus is (50, 40, 30, 20) miles one way.
8. (Short Sammy, Dot, Mrs. Prender, the Captain) has a job sorting mail and a house with a glass tower.

9. When Brigitte arrived in town, she carried just one little (computer, cell phone, suitcase, hat box).
10. Miles is (three, five, seven, eight) years old.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Why has Lucky named her dog HMS Beagle?
2. What is Lincoln's full name? Why does he have this name? Does he have future plans to live up to his name? Why or why not?
3. Why is Lucky haunted by fears of abandonment?

Comprehension Test B

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. You will use each name only once.

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| a. Lucky | e. Lucky's father | h. Chesterfield |
| b. Lincoln | f. Lucky's mother | i. Short Sammy |
| c. Miles | g. HMS Beagle | j. Brigitte |
| d. Roy | | |

- _____ 1. Rescues nice people who are lost in the desert, giving them a ride to safety.
_____ 2. Makes all sorts of noises all the time.
_____ 3. An artist with silky shoulders.
_____ 4. Feels abandoned and fears more abandonment.
_____ 5. Is named after a boat.
_____ 6. Admires Lucky's glistening eyebrows.
_____ 7. Is extremely fond of parsley.
_____ 8. Never wanted children.
_____ 9. Always wears cowboy clothes.
_____ 10. Is treated at an animal hospital for a snake bite.

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions. (The book title is a four-word answer.)

1. Who is the author of this novel? _____
2. What is the name of the town where Lucky and her neighbors live?

3. What kinds of meetings does Lucky eavesdrop on? _____
4. What item does Lucky carry around with her at all times? _____
5. Which famous scientist does Lucky strongly identify with? _____
6. What is Brigitte's native language? _____
7. What is the title of Miles's favorite book? _____
8. What kinds of specimens does Lucky collect in the desert? _____
9. What type of animal is Chesterfield? _____
10. What object contains the remains of Lucky's mother? _____
11. What kind of dress does Brigitte wear when she arrives in town?

12. What item does Lucky find in Brigitte's suitcase that convinces her that Brigitte is planning to leave?

13. What kind of shelter do Lucky and Miles stay in during the dust storm?

14. When she runs away, what item does Lucky pack to remind her of Brigitte?

15. What are two of Lincoln's other presidential names? _____

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

- Lucky's mother died when she stepped on a (rattlesnake, downed power line, cholla burr, poisonous lizard).
- Lucky, Lincoln, and Miles go to school in (Talc Town, Hard Pan, Darwin, Sierra City).
- Lucky is (eight, nine, ten, eleven) years old.
- Brigitte is Lucky's (guardian, stepmother, aunt, foster mother).
- Lucky considers herself to be an overall (blonde, sandy, chocolate, berry) color.
- Miles's mother is in (Florida, the hospital, jail, France).
- (Dot, Lucille, Brigitte, Sandi) runs a jewelry shop and beauty salon.

8. *Ma puce* means ("my dear," "my cabbage," "my child," "my flea").
9. Lucky removes a (cactus quill, cholla burr, tick, scorpion stinger) from Miles's foot.
10. Lincoln's favorite magazine is (Knot News, Desert Life, National Geographic Kids, Boys' Life).

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. How and why does Lucky direct her "meanness gland" at Miles? How and why does she make amends for this?
2. Why is Lucky so sure that Brigitte is planning to return to France?
3. Why does Lucky want to find her Higher Power?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. l | 6. k | 11. h |
| 2. o | 7. m | 12. f |
| 3. d | 8. b | 13. c |
| 4. a | 9. n | 14. e |
| 5. g | 10. j | 15. i |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. California | 9. Government Surplus |
| 2. France | 10. desert |
| 3. Found Object | 11. her father |
| 4. Knot Tyers | 12. (red silk) dress |
| 5. trailers | 13. dust storm |
| 6. (insect/spider) specimens | 14. restaurant |
| 7. alcoholic | 15. Café |
| 8. snake | |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Lucille | 6. grandmother |
| 2. Trimble | 7. 50 |
| 3. 43 | 8. the Captain |
| 4. kisses | 9. suitcase |
| 5. San Francisco | 10. five |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

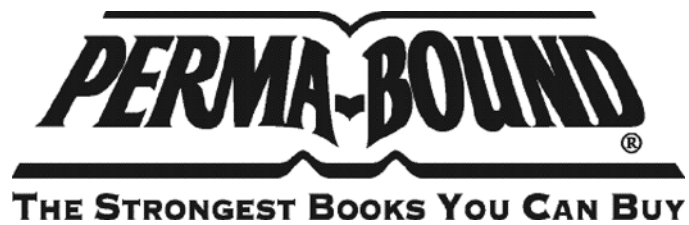
- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Susan Patron | 9. wild burro |
| 2. Hard Pan | 10. urn |
| 3. twelve-step/anonymous/
addiction recovery | 11. red silk |
| 4. survival backpack (kit) | 12. passport |
| 5. Charles Darwin | 13. (old miners') dugout/cave |
| 6. French | 14. parsley grinder |
| 7. <i>Are You My Mother?</i> | 15. Clinton/Carter/Kennedy (name two) |
| 8. insects/spiders | |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| 1. downed power line | 6. jail |
| 2. Sierra City | 7. Dot |
| 3. ten | 8. "my flea" |
| 4. guardian | 9. cholla burr |
| 5. sandy | 10. Knot News |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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