



When You Reach Me

By Rebecca Stead

Teacher's Guide

Written by A.L. Satterfield



CLASSROOM
FAVORITES

A Perma-Bound Production

This guide was prepared using the Wendy Lamb Books/Random House edition, ©2009. Other editions may differ.

Synopsis

Chapter 1: Things You Keep in a Box

The narrator, twelve-year-old Miranda, is addressing an unknown person. Her mother has just received a postcard telling her she will be a contestant on *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, hosted by Dick Clark, in New York City. The date for her appearance is April 27, 1979. Miranda tells this person that the postcard confirms his last "proof" concerning the events of the past fall and winter.

Chapter 2: Things that Go Missing

We are introduced to the narrator, Miranda, who is also the main character. She is a self-described "latchkey child," living in Manhattan with her single mother. Mom is a paralegal in the same firm where her German boyfriend, Richard, is a lawyer. Richard is tall and blond and has been nicknamed "Mr. Perfect" by Mom; the only thing imperfect about him is that one of his legs is shorter than the other, and he must wear a shoe with a two-inch heel. Mom, by contrast, is tiny, with curly auburn hair. Miranda and Richard are going to help Mom prepare with trivia questions for the game show appearance. Mom is discontent with her job, as demonstrated by the number of items she takes from the office supply closet. Mom desperately needs to win on the show.

Chapter 3: Things You Hide

Mother and daughter dispute the meaning of Miranda's name, which had its origins in the famous U.S. Supreme Court case responsible for the so-called "Miranda warnings" ("You have the right to remain silent ..."). Miranda's mother, who wanted to be a criminal defense attorney, thinks the name is beautiful because it "stands for people's rights"; Miranda, based on the words of Robbie B. (whose father is a prosecutor), is convinced

she was named after a dangerous criminal.

One day, Miranda forgets her key and spends several hours waiting in Belle's Market on Amsterdam Avenue. Miranda doesn't mind, since she is friends with Belle and helps her restock shelves and cull expired items. While she waits, Miranda talks to Belle about her favorite book, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. The book concerns time travel. We also learn that Miranda's former best friend is Sal, who lives in the apartment below. After Mom retrieves Miranda, they hide the spare key in the nozzle of the ancient fire hose in the apartment hallway, so Miranda won't be locked out again.



Chapter 4: The Speed Round

Miranda explains *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, a quiz show that pairs an ordinary person with a "celebrity contestant." The first part is a rapid guessing game Mom calls "the speed round." There will be little practice for Mom tonight, because it is time for the monthly tenants' meeting, which Mom hosts and for which she always takes notes; she passes on the tenants' complaints to the landlord and various city

agencies but no one ever responds. Sal's mother, Louisa, attends out of solidarity with Mom; most of the other attendees are lonely elderly tenants who view the meeting as a night out. Louisa, also a single mother, works in a nursing home; she and Mom met when their children were babies and they were both moving in. Miranda often relives the story with Mom: how Mom cried the first time she saw the filthy apartment, twelve years before, and spent the entire afternoon cleaning; how the first time Mom met Louisa in the lobby, when Miranda and Sal were infants, Sal was crying, but stopped the instant Miranda smiled at him.

Chapter 5: Things That Kick

Miranda thinks back to the start of the school year, when a strange man began to appear on her corner. This started before Sal quit being her friend—an event

she considers to be at the top of a long list of bad things that have happened. The man—nicknamed “Quack” by the local kids because he’s “quackers,” but referred to by Mom as “the laughing man”—talks to himself, laughs mysteriously, frequently kicks into the air, and sleeps with his head underneath the mailbox. Sal and Miranda are afraid of him, and pretend not to notice him when they walk past his spot on the street.

Chapter 6: Things That Get Tangled

Miranda ties knots when she has a problem. This is a habit she has acquired from Richard, who is a sailor and has taught her knot-tying as a stress-reliever. Miranda is tying knots right now because she is anxious about the note she has received from the unknown person, requesting that she tell him the entire story of what has happened. Although she doesn’t want to write this story, she knows she must. She identifies the beginning of the story as the day Sal got punched.

Chapter 7: Things That Stain

Miranda relives the fateful day. It is a day in October, when Sal and Miranda still walk home from school together. Their route takes them across a middle block between Broadway and Amsterdam, where a pack of older bullies hang out in front of a huge garage. Sal and Miranda are afraid of the bullies, who call them names and make fun of them if they do anything out of the ordinary. On the day of the incident, Miranda is carrying a “Mysteries of Science” poster titled “Why Do We Yawn?” The previous day, there was a fight, but today nothing seems to be happening. Suddenly, a medium-sized boy in a green army jacket breaks away from the pack and walks up to Sal, punching him in the stomach and smacking him in the face without apparent provocation. Then, after spending a moment reading the “Mysteries of Science” poster, he strolls away. Sal is hurt, but not seriously so, and he is crying, while Miranda tries to comfort him and help him walk home. Even the pack of bullies is indignant, yelling after the kid in the jacket. Before arriving at the apartment, Sal and Miranda pass the laughing man, who terrifies Sal by approaching him and shouting “Smart kid!” Sal runs to his apartment and slams the door in Miranda’s face, refusing to come out. This, Miranda believes, is the start of the story, as well as the day Sal quit being her friend.

Chapter 8: Mom’s Rules for Life in New York City

Mom has lots of safety rules for not appearing vulnerable to muggers, and for avoiding strangers and discouraging them from approaching. Miranda has her own trick when she sees a scary person (always a boy):

approach him directly and ask, politely, if he knows the time. She feels this is a good way of demonstrating that she is friendly and not worth mugging (since she doesn’t even own a watch). She finds that most of the people she is afraid of are really nicer than she expected.

Chapter 9: Things You Wish For

Miranda has flat brown hair, which is unlike Mom’s beautiful curls and for which she blames her nonexistent father. However, she has nothing against the man, and no desire to find him, unlike Meg, the heroine of *A Wrinkle in Time*. Miranda and Richard help Mom practice for the game show, and they have also put together a list of things to buy with the money—one an official one that is hanging on the refrigerator, and a secret list that they are hiding from Mom.

Chapter 10: Things That Sneak Up on You

The next day, Sal stays home for a “mental health day,” and Miranda must walk alone. Near the garage, the kid who punched Sal starts to follow her, and she whirls around to face him, asking him the time. He is surprised but kind, and shows her how to calculate the time by the position of the sun in the sky (he explains that he doesn’t have a watch). Miranda continues home, being careful not to wake the laughing man. The boy stops following her, and she realizes he must live in the apartment above the garage.

Chapter 11: Things That Bounce

Sal starts playing basketball behind the apartment after school and avoiding Miranda, despite her efforts to connect with him. One day, she asks him if he still wants to be friends, and he says he guesses not, for a while. The same week, at school, Julia and Annemarie, friends who are Miranda’s sixth-grade classmates, “break up,” and Miranda latches onto Annemarie so she won’t have to eat alone now that Sal has dropped her. Miranda dislikes Julia, who is wealthy and stuck-up. Miranda eats pizza with Annemarie at lunch, and notices that her new friend only eats the toppings, leaving the crust. She is happy when Annemarie invites her over after school.

Chapter 12: Things That Burn

Annemarie’s family is also well-off; her apartment has a friendly doorman, and her room has nice curtains and a plush rug. Her father, an illustrator, works at home, and makes snacks for the girls. He gives them something with mustard dipping sauce, which makes Miranda’s lips burn.

Chapter 13: The Winner's Circle

Miranda and Richard help Mom practice for the next category on *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, called the Winner's Circle. This is the category that wins contestants "the big money": \$10,000, \$15,000, or \$20,000.

Chapter 14: Things You Keep Secret

Miranda and her classmates in Mr. Tompkin's class are working on the "Main Street" project; "twelve-year-old genius" Jay Stringer is head of the Main Street Planning Board and approves all additions. Annemarie is building a stone wall; Alice Evans, who has problems getting to the bathroom on time, is making fire hydrants out of clay; Julia has made a tinfoil UFO for which she is awaiting approval. Miranda is working on a playground proposal. Mom says Mr. Tompkins is a "disappointed architect," who became a teacher, like many young men of his era, to avoid service in Vietnam.

"Wheelie," the secretary who runs the school from a wheeled office chair, enlists Miranda as a runner for the school dentist, who serves children whose parents can't afford private dental care. Miranda's job is to get his patients out of class. She is surprised to learn of the service, and is determined never to tell Mom, who would doubtless try to enroll her to save money. One of the patients is a sixth-grader from Mr. Anderson's class: Marcus Heilbroner. Miranda is shocked to realize that he is the boy who punched Sal. He seems not to recognize her. He reads an advanced mathematics book for fun at his appointment, and engages Miranda in a complicated discussion about time travel after seeing her copy of *A Wrinkle in Time*. Although she doesn't understand all of his observations about the novel, he is impressed that she has kept up as well as she has, and tells her she is "a pretty smart kid."

Chapter 15: Things That Smell

Colin has been Miranda's classmate since she was small, but they have had little real interaction. Now, however, Colin begins hanging out with Miranda and Annemarie. Colin has the idea of asking Jimmy, the eccentric owner of the nearby Jimmy's Sandwich Shop, for a job during lunch break. Jimmy agrees, so Colin, Miranda, and Annemarie spend every lunch hour making sandwiches in the shop, in exchange for free sodas and lunches. They eat their sandwiches after lunch, during silent reading time.

Chapter 16: Things You Don't Forget

Miranda returns home one Friday afternoon and discovers the apartment door unlocked; she thinks perhaps

Mom has forgotten to lock it, although that seems unlikely. Frightened, she goes to Sal's apartment and tells him what happened, but he doesn't invite her in. That night, Mom is doubtful that she could have forgotten to lock the door, but she and Miranda can find nothing out of place when they look through the apartment. Suddenly, Mom remembers the spare key; it has disappeared from its hiding place in the fire hose. It is a mystery: why would a burglar unlock the apartment and not steal anything? The following Monday, Miranda finds the stranger's first note.

Chapter 17: The First Note

On Monday morning, Miranda finds a strange note, written in tiny handwriting, stuck in the pages of her library book. The note, which addresses her as "M," begins: "This is hard. Harder than I expected, even with your help. But I have been practicing, and my preparations go well." The note goes on to say that the writer is coming "to save your friend's life, and my own." The writer requests that she write him a letter in which she mentions the location of her house key. He also explains that he will not be himself when he reaches her, since "the trip is a difficult one." Although Miranda and Mom are both "freaked" by the letter, and Mom changes the locks as a precaution, they can't see, logically, how Friday's key incident and this note are related; why would the thief, who already has the spare key, request a letter telling the key's location? Still, Miranda can't help feeling that, somehow, there is a connection.

Chapter 18: Things on a Slant

Jimmy allows Colin and Annemarie to serve customers at the counter after they learn his special "V-cut" to slice bread rolls, but Miranda can't make the cut correctly and so must continue to work in the back. Jimmy likes to tease the kids.

Chapter 19: White Things

Miranda begins to dread going past the boys by the garage because their heckling has changed; now they call her "sweet" and "baby." Mom advises ignoring them. Miranda brings Annemarie home to her apartment one day. On the way there, the laughing man unnerves them by repeatedly shouting "Angel!" and pointing at Annemarie. In a way it makes sense: Annemarie's coat is ankle length and pure white, and Miranda wonders how her father could possibly keep it so clean. When they arrive at the apartment, Miranda suddenly becomes conscious of how shabby it looks. Later, Mom returns home and walks the girls to Annemarie's apartment, where Annemarie's father gives them cookies with

white powdered sugar on them. Although Annemarie's father is charmed by Mom, Miranda is embarrassed.

Chapter 20: The Second Note

At Jimmy's, one of Miranda's jobs is to count the rolls in the bread delivery. One day in November, she finds the second note from the stranger, halfway through the big bag. The note frightens her and causes her to lose her place in the counting. In it, the writer asks her to "tell a story" before her memory fades. He also requests that she not "share" this note or any subsequent ones. Later, while Jimmy is outside taking a delivery, Miranda and Colin open the Fred Flintstone bank in the backroom, something Jimmy has emphatically warned them not to do. They discover that it is filled with two-dollar bills, folded in tiny triangles. While they are gazing into the bank, Miranda and Colin's foreheads press together.

Chapter 21: Things You Push Away

Mom is practicing for the Winner's Circle, a process she says involves "lifting the veil." Miranda explains that this is Mom's way of saying she needs to open her mind; Mom believes everyone has an intangible "veil" that enables them to go happily about their business without having to truly experience the world as it is. Lifting the veil means accessing a higher awareness—looking at the world as it is, not as it appears in ordinary life. Miranda wonders if some people are born without a veil and can see the Big Picture all the time. She wonders if the writer of the notes might be such a person.

Chapter 22: Things You Count

Miranda is at Jimmy's with Colin and Annemarie, counting the bread order. She calls Julia "Swiss Miss" behind her back—a reference to Julia's bragging about her family's trips to Switzerland—and Jimmy tells her she is funny. Colin tells Miranda it would make Jimmy's day if the roll order came up short, and that someday she should throw a roll away just to make Jimmy happy. In the wake of the forehead-touching incident, Miranda now feels "good-strange" whenever she looks at Colin. She suspects Annemarie feels the same way about him.

Chapter 23: Messy Things

Annemarie and Miranda return to class after their lunch job at Jimmy's. Julia sees them outside class and, speaking only to Annemarie, dramatically points out a mustard stain on Annemarie's "favorite" turquoise sweater. Julia wonders loudly why Annemarie—but not Miranda—needs to work at the store, since she doesn't need the money. When Annemarie tells her they're just working for sandwiches and sodas, Julia mentions that

Annemarie isn't supposed to eat sandwiches and soda. Miranda privately comments to Annemarie that Julia is rude, but Annemarie seems to have taken Julia's words to heart. Later, during silent reading time, Julia shoots a rubber band at Miranda's head—a declaration of war.

Chapter 24: Invisible Things

On the way back from the office to pick up mimeographs for Mr. Tompkins, Miranda encounters Marcus in the hallway; she says hello, but he doesn't appear to recognize or even see her. Back in class, Miranda slightly rips and crumples Julia's copy before handing it to her.

Chapter 25: Things You Hold On To

Jimmy sends Miranda on an errand to the A&P to get light bulbs, and he tells her to request two-dollar bills for change. He explains that they hate two-dollar bills at the A&P, and that most people hold onto them because they're rare: there is only one in circulation for every twelve one-dollar bills. Even without her secret knowledge of the Fred Flintstone bank, it is apparent to Miranda that, unlike the workers at the A&P, Jimmy loves two-dollar bills. When Miranda returns, the store is empty of customers except for Julia. Julia snubs Miranda and mocks Jimmy's American cheese, but insists that she is a paying customer. Jimmy orders her out of the store anyway. Although she pretends to agree with her friends that Jimmy is unreasonable, Miranda is secretly pleased; Jimmy, she thinks, sees through Julia, just like she does.

Chapter 26: Salty Things

It is the Friday after Thanksgiving, but Mom has to work anyway. Louisa frequently brings unopened bags of potato chips and animal cookies to Miranda's mom—cast-offs from the nursing home that Mom takes to her once-a-month parenting group for pregnant inmates at the jail downtown. Running the group is a mission of mercy for Mom; she does it, she tells Miranda, to help the women in jail feel as though someone cares—because jail can change people in bad ways, making them feel "like a mistake is all they are." While she's delivering the snacks, Louisa tells Miranda that she misses her—a reference to the broken friendship with Sal. Miranda feels sorrow over this loss. Later, Mom snaps at Richard during dinner, frustrated by the menial work she must do at the law firm. Richard discovers that the work shoes he left in the closet several months ago—one with a special sole to accommodate his short leg—are missing, and Mom realizes that the burglar stole something from them after all.

Chapter 27: Things You Pretend

Miranda, Annemarie, and Colin are stuck inside for school lunch, because a naked man is running down Broadway and school officials won't let the kids outside until he's caught or goes away. The same naked man has appeared before, always running past the school. Miranda sees Sal jockeying for position at a table full of boys; he looks at her, then pretends not to see her. Later, in the middle of a conversation, Annemarie seems to fall into a trance, and Julia unexpectedly comes along to help Miranda get Annemarie's focus back. Julia acts friendly, briefly, and Miranda can almost imagine that they could be friends. The spell is broken, though, and Julia stalks away. Then, Annemarie is called to the nurse's office, and doesn't return to class for the rest of the day.

Chapter 28: Things That Crack

Outside the classroom, Julia confronts Miranda, calling her an "idiot" for roping Annemarie into a job where she eats bread and drinks soda. Annemarie has epilepsy, Julia explains, and those foods make the illness worse; her dad has her on a special diet for that reason. Julia also demands to know why Miranda hates her. Miranda pretends ignorance, but feels herself begin to react to being "put on the spot, since of course she *does* despise Julia. At the moment of confrontation, Julia flings her arm out, and her precious watch hits the floor with a crack, breaking the crystal. Julia picks it up and stalks away. Later, on the way to school, Miranda is trailing Sal, who is a half-block ahead of her. This has become a routine of sorts, since Sal continues to ostracize her. Up ahead, she sees Marcus exit his front door and head straight toward Sal, and she senses Sal starting to panic. Although she could intervene—call out to Sal, or Marcus, thereby defusing the situation and reassuring Sal about Marcus—Miranda does nothing. Sal has, after all, made his feelings clear. Later, looking back, Miranda realizes this simple act would have changes subsequent events for the better. Instead, Miranda watches as Sal bends down to tie his shoe, a desperation move designed to assure Marcus that he is not worth beating up. However, Marcus walks past both Sal and Miranda, as if he has never seen them before.

Chapter 29: Things Left Behind

That night, the same night as the incident in the cafeteria, Miranda calls Annemarie to see if she's all right. Annemarie is excited because someone has left a perfect rose on her doorstep. There is no note. Annemarie speculates about who could have left it, and although

it's clear she wants Miranda to suggest Colin is the admirer, Miranda can't do it. Instead, she confronts Annemarie about her dietary restrictions, and Annemarie confesses that she is epileptic and isn't supposed to eat any starches or soda. Although the diet works, keeping seizures to a minimum, she chafes under the restrictions and is tired of feeling different. The job at Jimmy's has given her freedom from both dietary limitations and Julia's nagging. Miranda points out that she can still work at Jimmy's—she just needs to avoid his "crummy" food. Annemarie laughs. She has been throwing away her special lunches every day, she confesses, and her father was angry when he found out.

Chapter 30: The Third Note

The first cold day of December, Miranda's mother tells her to wear her winter coat to school. Mentally, Miranda unfavorably compares her mother, calling raspy directions from bed, to Meg's mom in *A Wrinkle in Time*, rising early to make her children French toast. On the way to school, Miranda finds a third note from the stranger in her coat pocket; the note contains clues—"proof"—that will only make sense later. One of them is "3 p.m. today: Colin's knapsack"; another is "Christmas Day. Tesser well." The third is the reference to the date of Mom's upcoming appearance on the game show (weeks before she learns about it). Most troubling of all is an explanation of the purpose of yawns—the subject of the "Mysteries of Science" poster Miranda was carrying when Marcus punched Sal. This is bothersome because it shows the stranger has been watching her. Unexpectedly, Marcus doesn't ignore her this day on the way to school, but actually walks with her.

Chapter 31: Things That Make No Sense

As they're walking, Miranda asks Marcus a question about time travel, which Marcus tries unsuccessfully to answer. Unexpectedly, Julia jumps in with a clearer explanation, using her diamond-chip ring as an illustration: time, she explains, is made of numerous, distinct points, like the chips in the ring. Miranda still doesn't understand, and Julia huffs away in frustration. Marcus takes up the illustration, inspired by Julia's perceptiveness. The bottom line is that time is nonlinear, and that all points in time exist all the time. Still frustrated with his explanations, Miranda changes the subject, demanding to know why Marcus hit Sal. His answer is that he wanted to see what would happen—"besides the ordinary things." Marcus also concedes that this was a "very, very dumb" thing to do. Just then, the laughing man hurries up behind them, focused intently on the garbage can next to Marcus. Suddenly, the man looks

up, sees Marcus, curses—and runs away. Miranda comments on the weirdness of the incident, and Marcus tells her this is the second time it's happened.

Chapter 32: The First Proof

Miranda and Colin work at Jimmy's; Annemarie is still out of school, but scheduled to return soon. Jimmy is full of happiness: the bread order has come up two rolls short, and he can now complain to his supplier. While he is otherwise occupied, Colin and Miranda make a plan to sneak off to the pizza place for lunch on their way back to school. Feeling guilty, they make their sandwiches as usual so as not to tip Jimmy off, then duck as they pass his shop so he won't look out the window and see them eating pizza. That afternoon, at 3 p.m., Miranda surreptitiously checks Colin's backpack, where she discovers the two missing rolls—the mysterious writer's first "proof."

Chapter 33: Things You Give Away

Miranda visits Annemarie and tries to persuade her that it was her father, and not Colin, who left the rose. She feels guilty for disappointing Annemarie, but envy drives her; Annemarie has so much, and it seems unfair that she should have Colin as an admirer as well. On the way home, Miranda encounters the laughing man and offers him her sandwich. She notices for the first time how old he is, and that he seems strangely familiar at times. They have a few moments of lucid conversation before he slips away mentally. Before she leaves him, he tells her, "I'm an old man, and she's gone now. So don't worry, okay?" He calls her "smart kid" when she tells him she won't.

Chapter 34: Things That Get Stuck

Miranda goes home and tells her mother about the incident with the laughing man. However, instead of praising her for sharing her food with him, Mom explodes. Later she apologizes, confessing that she was worried for Miranda's safety and wants her to avoid some of her (Mom's) mistakes; she claims she's made "about a million" of them, although Miranda outweighs most of them. Then she confesses that Richard wants to marry her and move in. This makes Miranda happy, but Mom isn't sure if it's the right thing to do: she feels "stuck."

Chapter 35: Tied-Up Things

Annemarie is sleeping over for the first time, and Miranda notices again how shabby the apartment looks. She is critical of her mother, and they have another spat. Miranda remembers all the sleepovers with Sal that ended in the middle of the night when Sal got scared

and had to go home. In the evening, Annemarie's father delivers a box of snacks for her special diet. Annemarie reveals her own problems with envy; she thinks Mom is "so cool," and wishes her father would be more like Mom, instead of treating her like "a baby." In the morning, Miranda is grateful to her mother for making a special breakfast for Annemarie.

Chapter 36: Things That Turn Pink

Two days before Christmas vacation, Jimmy locks the kids out of the shop at lunchtime; someone has stolen his Fred Flintstone bank, and he thinks it's them. The kids speculate fruitlessly about the identity of the culprit. They decide to go to Gold's Stationery to buy a card, which Annemarie picks out. Miranda feels another pang of envy when she discovers that Annemarie has an account at Gold's, and Annemarie turns pink when the cashier asks after Julia. Later, the girls go to Annemarie's house, where they write a note to Jimmy insisting they did not take his bank but are sorry it's missing. They discuss plans for Christmas vacation, and Miranda tries not to think about Sal.

Chapter 37: Things That Fall Apart

They leave the card under Jimmy's door in the morning, and at lunchtime Jimmy waves them in. He has thought about it and decided that they didn't take the bank and they can come back to work. However, he bans "your friend, little Swiss Miss" from the shop, saying some things are "in the blood." They realize that he is implying that Julia is a thief because she is part black. An outraged Annemarie calls him a "racist pig" and storms out, followed by Miranda and Colin. Annemarie turns her wrath on Miranda when she learns the origin of the nickname. Although Miranda explains that she was not referring to race and that Jimmy misinterpreted, Annemarie is not appeased, and suggests that Miranda is the more likely culprit, since she needs the money. They don't talk to each other again before the end of the day, when Christmas vacation starts.

Chapter 38: Christmas Vacation

Miranda spends three days home alone before Christmas, listening to the sound of Sal playing basketball in the back with his friends, and brooding. She admits to herself that it matters to her that Sal has abandoned her, and that Julia has green suede boots and Annemarie has a charge account at Gold's while she is a latchkey kid. She tries not to think.

Chapter 39: The Second Proof

Mom is off work the day before Christmas and

Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve, she, Miranda, and Richard have a party with Mom's work friends. They exchange gifts on Christmas Day. One of them is a special gift from Richard: a signed first edition of *A Wrinkle in Time*. On it, the author, Madeleine L'Engle, has written "Miranda, Tesser well." It is the second proof. Miranda is now convinced that the mysterious writer really *does* know about things that will happen in the future. She feels very alone.

Chapter 40: Things in an Elevator

New Year's Day arrives. It is warm, and Miranda decides to go out, leaving a note for her still-sleeping mother. Sal is playing basketball out back. Miranda walks to the deserted school playground, feeling "weird" and thinking about Annemarie; she wonders if they are still friends, since they haven't spoken in ten days. At the school, she sees the laughing man, peering into the garbage can. On impulse, Miranda calls Annemarie. Her father answers and invites her to come over to surprise Annemarie. The girls have a wonderful morning until Mom calls, frantic with worry and angry. Miranda realizes she has completely forgotten about her mother. Even Annemarie's father, normally so easygoing, is angry with Miranda, and when Mom arrives, he apologizes. On the elevator down to the street, Mom bursts into tears, and so does Miranda. Mom confesses her terror when Miranda didn't return. Miranda apologizes; then, the two of them go to a movie. Later, they find Richard waiting outside the apartment, having been forgotten by Mom. The laughing man is back at his post, practicing kicks. The day ends happily as Miranda, Mom, and Richard go to supper at a nearby diner.

Chapter 41: Things You Realize

School has begun in a new year: 1979. At an assembly, Miranda sits by Alice Evans, the girl who always has to pee at the wrong moment but is too shy to ask to be excused. Miranda is staring longingly at Sal, who is a few rows ahead of her. She sees Julia looking at Annemarie the same way, and realizes that she, Miranda, is standing in the way of Julia and Annemarie's reunion. She guesses that Julia must have left the rose on Annemarie's doorstep. Suddenly, wracked with guilt and determined to do something kind, Miranda asks Alice to be her bathroom partner, then gets excused from the assembly so the other girl won't wet her pants. As they leave, Miranda sees Colin and Jay Stringer laughing together, apparently at her.

Chapter 42: Things You Beg For

While Alice is in the bathroom, Miranda runs down the

hall to the office and begs a piece of scrap paper from Wheelie. When they return to the assembly, Miranda drops the folded piece of paper into Julia's lap. On it she has written "Truce," and her phone number.

Chapter 43: Things That Turn Upside Down

Sal has invited Colin to play. Miranda walks home behind the two boys. She wants more than anything to join them, but instead goes into Belle's store, where she continues telling Belle about *A Wrinkle in Time*. Miranda recounts the episode where Meg saves Charles from the clutches of "IT" with the only force stronger than IT—love—and then time-travels with her brother back home, where they land in the broccoli patch in the family vegetable garden. This conversation reminds her of the earlier one with Marcus. During the visit, Belle tells her that the laughing man has recently begun buying a sandwich and a banana each day, paying each time with a two-dollar bill folded into a triangular shape. Miranda realizes that the laughing man stole Jimmy's Fred Flintstone bank. Later, she passes the laughing man, who is kicking and shaking his fist at the sky. As she passes, he once again points to her and yells "Smart kid!" Later, Colin sees Miranda in the apartment lobby and begs her to hang out; however, Sal is still aloof, so Miranda makes an excuse and heads upstairs. She gets a call from Julia, and they decide to make a flourless chocolate cake for Annemarie's birthday using Julia's mother's recipe. Later, Colin knocks at Miranda's door and kisses her. After a moment, she kisses him back; then he smiles and runs away. Miranda feels that this is one of those moments in life that changes everything.

Chapter 44: Things That Are Sweet

At Julia's house after school, the girls practice making the cake recipe. Although Julia's mother is technically in the apartment, she is meditating and can't be disturbed; they actually have more contact with Miranda's mother, whom they call several times with questions. Miranda recognizes that, despite the fact that Julia's mother stays at home and her family has more money, Julia is for all intents and purposes a latchkey kid just like her. Moreover, Mom is more present in Miranda's life than Julia's mother is in hers. Julia's room looks like a dollhouse—décor that Julia dislikes. She prefers UFO posters, which Julia's mother has consigned to the bathroom. There, Miranda sees Julia's "Mysteries of Science" poster; it is titled, "Is There Intelligent Life on Other Planets?" Like Miranda, Julia has a battered copy of *A Wrinkle in Time*, and she is envious when she learns of Miranda's signed first edition. Julia decides that Miranda's hair is not the boring brown she'd thought it

was—it’s “more of a caramel!”

Chapter 45: The Last Note

It is shortly after the visit to Julia’s house. Miranda is walking home from school. She watches as a series of events unfold: the bullies tease Sal (who is walking ahead of her), and he snaps, yelling at them and hurrying past. Suddenly, Marcus runs out of his apartment door, clearly intent on apologizing to Sal; however, Sal doesn’t know this, and begins to run—into busy Amsterdam Avenue, straight into the path of an oncoming truck. He is about to be killed, and Miranda begins to scream. All this time, the laughing man has been watching, and Miranda briefly sees what looks like a film image of a naked crouching man, flickering for a few seconds next to the laughing man before fading out. Suddenly, the laughing man runs to Sal, gives a mighty kick to Sal’s back that pushes him out of the truck’s path, and is himself struck by the truck. Marcus crumples to the ground, sobbing and shaking, while the boys at the corner watch in silent shock. Miranda runs to the unconscious Sal; she is pushed aside by the truck driver, who administers CPR. Belle leads Miranda out of the street, shielding her from the sight of the laughing man’s remains in the street. As she passes the mailbox, Miranda sees one of Richard’s stolen shoes, and finds a note in it instructing her to write about this event and everything leading up to it. She is to deliver it by hand: “You know where to find me.” Back on the street, Sal cries out, and the truck driver praises God for a miracle. Miranda realizes that the laughing man wrote the notes; that he has saved Sal’s life; and that he is now dead.

Chapter 46: Difficult Things

That night, Richard stays at the apartment with Miranda while Mom is at the hospital. Sal has broken some bones but is otherwise fine; he is being held for observation. Miranda pieces together the rest of the puzzle: time travel is possible; the laughing man was a time traveler (naked for the trip because he could carry nothing but the pieces of paper in his mouth); though the trip scrambled his mind, he had succeeded in saving Sal, but had apparently failed in his second goal: to save himself. Richard has ordered pizza and bought delicious grapes, and he and Miranda eat and watch TV in comfortable silence. Mom returns, comforting Miranda and reassuring her about Sal. Miranda doesn’t tell Mom the true story, for fear that doing so will change events.

Chapter 47: Things That Heal

The next night, Mom and Miranda visit Sal and Louisa. After a few moments, the grownups leave the kids

alone to talk. Sal tells Miranda that he still wants to be her friend; he just decided he needed a break after realizing he had no other friends and wanted to spend time with boys, too. Miranda realizes Sal is right—she really didn’t have other friends until Sal’s defection forced her to make some. She tries to reassure Sal that Marcus is OK, but Sal remains doubtful. Finally, Sal reveals that he had already made up his mind to “take a break” before Marcus punched him; the timing was merely a coincidence. After this talk, Miranda and Sal’s friendship—though not the same as before—is restored.

Chapter 48: Things You Protect

Miranda is in the school office with Wheelie when the police arrive, looking for Marcus Heilbruner. The all-knowing Wheelie pretends not to know Marcus’ name, which tips Miranda off that Marcus is in danger. Afraid, Miranda runs down to the dentist’s office, where she uses the phone to call Mom, who says she’ll come right away. Miranda explains to the dentist that Marcus is in trouble, and he gives her a note to call Marcus in for dental work. Miranda and the dentist wait with Marcus in the locked office until Mom arrives, playing the part of a lawyer; she tells the police they can’t speak to Marcus without his parents’ permission, and they depart. In the meantime, Marcus explains in more detail why he punched Sal—as an experiment, to feel a connection. It is apparent that Marcus is both a “good kid” and someone who has trouble relating to others.

Chapter 49: Things You Line Up

Over the course of the next several days, Mom, looking lawyerly, resolves Marcus’ legal problems. It turns out that Belle had misinterpreted Marcus’ actions when he chased Sal, and had reported him to the police. Statements are signed, stories corroborated, and the matter is dropped. Richard tells Mom she looks good dressed as a lawyer, and Mom, for once, accepts the compliment. Time passes, and Miranda tries to forget the laughing man, until the day the postcard with the summons to *The \$20,000 Pyramid* arrives—the third proof. Miranda knows she must write the story.

Chapter 50: The \$20,000 Pyramid

The day of the show arrives. It is also Richard’s birthday. Sal and Louisa accompany Mom, Miranda, and Richard on the subway to the studio. Louisa seems even more nervous than Mom, and she keeps commenting about how Dick Clark never seems to change—“he looks just the same now as he did back in 1956.” Mom has a smart celebrity partner, and she aces the speed round, but Miranda, Richard, and Louisa begin to get nervous

again during the “chat” portion before the Winner’s Circle. Miranda begins chanting “magic thread, magic thread” in an effort to help Mom concentrate on “lifting the veil.” Finally, the game resumes at Dick Clark’s word; then, time suddenly changes.

Chapter 51: Magic Thread

Mom is jumping up and down triumphantly on the stage, and Miranda and the rest are running down to join her. The whole scene appears like a dream to Miranda, because she has just had an experience of the veil being lifted: in an instant, all the pieces of the puzzle fit together, and she realizes that the laughing man—the magic thread—is Marcus; and, as his note said, she knows where to find him. Back in regular time, onstage, she celebrates Mom’s win.

Chapter 52: Things That Open

Mom did not win the entire \$20,000 because she had to switch celebrities for the second round, but she has won a total of \$12,100. They are officially “rich,” and very excited. At home, Mom makes a birthday cake and tacos, pausing periodically to whoop exultantly, and Miranda goes to her room to get presents for Mom and Richard. Mom’s present, from Richard, comes first; it includes applications to law school and, it is implied, a promise of assistance. Richard’s present is a set of keys, one to the lobby and one to the apartment. Miranda has made him a keychain out of macramé.

Chapter 53: Things That Blow Away

The next day, Miranda begins writing the letter to Marcus, and she realizes that, though Marcus is a hero, the story is a sad one for him and potentially a tremendous burden. She has pieced together almost everything that has happened, but she still wonders why Marcus used to lie with his head under the mailbox. Examining its underside, she discovers that he had wedged a piece of paper into it with the key he’d stolen from the fire hose. The picture was a line drawing of a still-beautiful elderly lady, who Miranda recognizes as Julia. Now Miranda understands what he told her the afternoon she gave him her sandwich: I’m an old man, and she’s gone now. So don’t worry, okay? Though still sad for Marcus, Miranda is reassured that he found his soul mate, and was ready to die. She leaves the drawing and the key where Marcus put them.

Chapter 52: Sal and Miranda, Miranda and Sal

More time passes. Though they both have a wider circle of friends now, Sal and Miranda are buddies again, and they still spend time together and walk home occasion-

ally. When they do, they always turn around and salute after crossing Amsterdam Avenue, and sometimes Miranda shakes her fist at the sky, in honor of the laughing man/Marcus.

Chapter 53: Parting Gifts

Miranda is finishing up her letter and planning to give it to Marcus. She has figured out a few more things since she began writing. For instance, she now realizes the naked man was also Marcus, practicing time-travel, and that he was naked and had to transport the notes in his mouth because he literally couldn’t carry anything with him. She ponders various advice and hints to give the present-day Marcus; but in the end, she decides to simply hand him the letter, with an admonition to try not to land in the broccoli. She figures he’ll understand—he’s a pretty smart kid, after all.

Timeline: the 1970s

- 1970**
 - The Aswan High Dam is completed in Egypt
 - The Beatles break up
 - Bar codes and floppy disks are introduced
 - 72,000 die in the Great Peruvian Earthquake
 - The U.S. celebrates the first Earth Day
- 1971**
 - VCRs, CAT scans, and microprocessors available
 - The USSR and NASA send probes to Mars
 - China joins the United Nations
 - The United States bans TV cigarette ads
 - The U.S. voting age is lowered to 18 from 21
 - The classified Pentagon Papers are published
- 1972**
 - The television show *MASH* premieres
 - Tragedy strikes the Summer Olympics in Munich: Palestinian terrorists murder 11 Israeli athletes
 - U.S. swimmer Mark Spitz wins 7 Olympic gold medals
 - Pocket calculators are introduced
 - Four men are arrested for a break-in at the Democratic headquarters in Washington’s Watergate Hotel
 - Richard Nixon meets with leaders in Beijing and Moscow—both firsts for a U.S. president
 - American Bobby Fischer beats Russian Boris Spassky at the World Chess Championships in Iceland
 - President Nixon defeats Sen. George McGovern in a landslide election

- 1973**
 - The U.S. Supreme Court legalizes abortion in *Roe v. Wade*
 - Chicago's Sears Tower is completed
 - The Paris Peace Accords end the Vietnam War
 - U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew resigns amid charges of tax evasion; Gerald R. Ford replaces him
 - The Sydney Opera House opens
 - Egypt and Syria instigate the Yom Kippur War, mounting a surprise attack on Israel
 - In retaliation for U.S. support of Israel, OPEC launches an oil embargo; rationing and skyrocketing gasoline prices result
- 1974**
 - Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia is deposed
 - Heiress Patti Hearst is kidnapped in California by a group of domestic terrorists
 - The Terracotta Army of Chinese Emperor Qin Shih Huang is discovered by farmers near Xi'an. The find, dating to 210 B.C., includes more than 8,000 lifelike and life-size soldiers
 - President Nixon resigns over Watergate scandal
 - India conducts its first nuclear weapons test
- 1975**
 - Arthur Ashe of the U.S. becomes the first black man to win the men's singles tennis title at Wimbledon
 - Civil War erupts in Lebanon
 - Microsoft Corp. is founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen
 - Pol Pot becomes the Communist dictator of Cambodia
 - Disposable razors are introduced
 - The first home computer is introduced
 - The U.S. and USSR start first joint space mission
 - Saigon falls to Communist forces
- 1976**
 - The first artificial gene is created in a test tube
 - The Cray Supercomputer is launched
 - Chinese Communist dictator Mao Zedong dies
 - Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci, 14, scores a record seven perfect "10s" at the Montreal Summer Olympics
 - The Tangshan Earthquake in northern China kills more than 240,000 people
 - The United States celebrates its Bicentennial
 - Jimmy Carter narrowly defeats President Ford
- 1977**
 - Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is first used to map the brain
 - Rock-and-roll icon Elvis Presley dies
- 1978**
 - Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat becomes the first Arab leader to visit Israel and acknowledge its right to exist
 - The Alaskan Oil Pipeline is completed
 - The movie *Star Wars* is released
 - President Carter pardons Vietnam draft evaders
 - President Carter creates the Energy Dept.
- 1978**
 - The first "tube baby," conceived through in vitro fertilization, is born
 - John Paul II becomes pope
 - Ultrasound is used for the first time
 - The Camp David Accords are signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat
 - Cartoon character Garfield the cat is syndicated
- 1979**
 - Margaret Thatcher becomes Britain's 1st female British prime minister
 - The shah of Iran is deposed; Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini becomes leader
 - The American embassy in Tehran is taken over by militant students loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini; 52 U.S. citizens are held hostage for 444 days.
 - Sony introduces the Walkman
 - The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan
 - A partial core meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania becomes history's worst nuclear accident until the Soviet Chernobyl disaster seven years later
 - Mother Teresa wins the Nobel Peace Prize
 - The American Pioneer Eleven passes Saturn
 - The federal government approves a \$1.5 billion bailout for Chrysler Corp.

Author Sketch

A lifelong resident of New York City, Rebecca Stead was born in January of 1968 and graduated from Vassar College in 1989. A lawyer, she worked for many years as a public defender before becoming a full-time writer to spend more time with the two sons she has with husband Sean O'Brien, also a lawyer.

A self-described "strange kid," Stead has said that she was "always on the lookout for magic" as a child, attempting to find signs of magic powers in herself, and this desire for magic later translated into a love for the "magic" of books. According to Stead, she began re-

reading, then writing, children's books to comfort herself after one of her sons accidentally pushed her laptop computer off a table, thereby destroying it and all the files for her "serious" fiction. The result of that first children's book-writing effort was *First Light* (2007), a well-received science fiction fantasy about an American boy, in Greenland with his parents to study global warming, who encounters a mysterious race of matriarchal ice dwellers. That book was followed by the Newbery Award-winning *When You Reach Me* in 2009. Stead lives with her family on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Critic's Corner

Rebecca Stead has written that she always wanted to be writer but became a lawyer instead because she thought it was more "practical." She quit lawyering and returned to writing after the birth of her children. Her debut novel, 2007's *First Light*, was well-received for its imaginative combination of fantasy, science fiction, and coming-of-age novel; her second novel, *When You Reach Me*, a bestseller, won widespread critical praise and received the prestigious John Newbery Award for contribution to children's literature. She has said that she loves writing for middle-grade readers because they are smart and open to ideas. On her website, she has these words of wisdom about her chosen career path: "The most important thing to know about writing is that there are no rules."

Selected Other Works by Rebecca Stead

First Light (2007)

Bibliography

"Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A With Rebecca Stead," http://www.amazon.com/When-You-Reach-Rebecca-Stead/dp/0385737424/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1288727929&sr=1-1

"Biography from Rebecca Stead's Amazon.com Page," http://www.amazon.com/Rebecca-Stead/e/B001IR1PEE/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0

"Miranda v. Arizona," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_v._Arizona

"Miranda (*The Tempest*)," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_\(The_Tempest\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_(The_Tempest))

"The 1970s—The Nation in Flux," From *America's Best History*, <http://americasbesthistory.com/abhtimeline1970.html>

"1970s Timeline" (from *Timeline of the 20th Century*, Jennifer Rosenberg, about.com, <<http://history1900s.about.com/od/timelines/tp/1970timeline.htm>>

"1970s Timeline," Prabhakar Pillai<Buzzle.com, <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/1970s-timeline.html>

Official website, <http://www.rebeccasteadbooks.com/> "Rebecca Stead,"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebecca_Stead

"Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount – 1774 to present,"

<<http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>>

Time travel, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_travel

General Objectives

1. To analyze Stead's storytelling style and its function
2. To note and comment on kids' reactions to the changes of adolescence
2. To discuss the role of friendship in the lives of pre-teens
3. To discuss the importance of parental figures for kids, and the effects of their absence
4. To discuss the strengths and faults of community and family
5. To discuss the ways in which people and events may not be as they appear
6. To discuss the way misinterpretation of others' actions can lead to unintended consequences

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the novel's title
2. To assess the main characters' personalities
3. To discuss the role of time, and different perceptions and conceptions of time, in the story
4. To analyze how Marcus' actions, and Miranda's reactions to them, spark the main events of the story
5. To speculate on how the story would have turned out differently if key characters had reacted differently—if, for instance, Miranda had explained to Sal that Marcus was a "good kid," or Marcus had been better able to connect with ordinary people
6. To analyze the theme of missed opportunities and second chances in the story, both with the child characters and with secondary adult characters, such as Mom

7. To recognize and explain the universality of situations discussed in the book

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me* should include these aspects:

Themes

- the nature of family
- The power of love
- personal responsibility for actions
- friendship
- growing up
- the nature of time
- unforeseen consequences of actions
- love
- racism
- wealth and poverty
- social activism
- personal autonomy vs. safety
- genius and insanity
- overcoming fear

Motifs

- consequences of choosing the "safe" option when you know you should be bold
- homelessness, hunger, incarceration, mental illness, and other social ills
- the need to protect others
- misinterpreting what we see
- making new friends
- comparing ourselves to others
- dealing with different kinds of disabilities

Literary Terms and Applications

A study of the central issues and situations in Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me* should include these aspects:

• **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, sixth-grader Miranda and her friends must navigate changing social dynamics, including romantic feelings, as they make the transition between childhood and adolescence. Miranda, Marcus, and others also must begin to learn to deal

with, and take responsibility for, the real-world consequences of their actions.

• **Fantasy**: a fictional work that departs radically from a realistic depiction of the world as we know it. In a fantasy, readers are expected to accept the seemingly impossible (such as the idea that people can travel back through time and use their knowledge of outcomes to alter their futures), although the tale presents logical and meaningful characterizations, and, often, true-to-life observations of daily life.

• **Foreshadowing**: a series of hints at themes and events yet to develop in the story. An example of this would be the opening of the book, with the summons from *The \$20,000 Pyramid* and Miranda's reference to a letter she has been asked to write, and to events she would rather forget.

• **Protagonist**: the main character in a play or novel. Miranda is the novel's protagonist, with the focus on her struggles with changes in friendships and social groups, her delving into the mystery of time, and her learning to take responsibility for her actions and relationships.

• **Setting**: the time and place in which the action of a story takes place. Manhattan in the late 1970s is an integral part of this novel, shaping the lives and determining the actions of many of the characters.

• **Universality**: a quality or theme that applies to all people at all times. The experiences of losing and making friends, facing responsibility for actions, and dealing with approaching adolescence and other life changes are universal experiences.

The Importance of Setting

The setting is Manhattan in the 1970s, during a time in American culture of great social transition and economic uncertainty, but also, perhaps, of greater freedom and a greater sense of possibility than today. One of the notable things about the setting is the degree of freedom and autonomy experienced by schoolchildren: Miranda and her friends in the sixth grade walk to and from school in the city alone, leave campus during lunch hour to work a part-time job, travel alone to other neighborhoods to play with friends, and essentially roam around unsupervised until their parents get home from work. This was a way of life that was common for middle-class people in the 1970s but has since all but disappeared, and students reading today may be surprised by how much unstructured, unsupervised time Miranda and her friends enjoyed. Rebecca Stead has said in interviews that one of the reasons she chose the 1970s setting was because of the freedom kids enjoyed

in the past: "There's another reason I set the story in the past, which is that I wanted to show a world of kids with a great deal of autonomy, and I wasn't sure that it would ring true in a modern New York setting. For better or for worse, life is different now."

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Lloyd Alexander, *The Book of Three*
 Avi, *Bright Shadow*
 L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*
 John Bellairs, *The House With a Clock in its Walls*
 Linda Buckley-Archer, *The Time Traveler* (The Gideon Trilogy)
 Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*
 Diane Duane, *So You Want to Be a Wizard*
 Ian Fleming, *Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang*
 Todd Fonseca, *The Time Cavern*
 Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*
 Robert Heinlein, *Citizen of the Galaxy; Have Spacesuit, Will Travel; Red Planet; and Starman Jones*
 Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle"
 Brian Jacques, *Lord Brocktree*
 Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*
 Diane Wynne Jones, *Witch Week*
 Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*
 Ursula K. LeGuin, *Wizard of Earthsea*
 Gail Caron Levine, *Ella Enchanted*
 C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
 Patricia A. McKillip, *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*
 Garth Nix, *Sabriel*
 Dian Curtis Regan, *Princess Nevermore*
 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* and *The Trilogy of the Ring*
 Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
 H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* and *The Chronic Argonauts*
 Patricia C. Wrede, *Dealing with Dragons*
 Jane Yolen, *Wizard's Hall*

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers are given to find the context in which the item appears.

1. There it is, in your tiny handwriting: April 27th, Studio TC-15, the words all jerky-looking, like you wrote them on the subway. Your last "proof." ("Things You Keep in a Box," pp. 1-2)
(This quote foreshadows the retelling of the strange story of time travel and second chances, as Miranda

receives the final "proof" that the stranger's story is true.)

2. Richard and I figured out a while ago that the more stuff Mom swipes from the office supply closet, the more she's hating work. I look at the markers for a second and then get back to my word piles. ("Things That Go Missing," p. 6)
(Mom is a single mother, a paralegal, and Richard is her boyfriend, a lawyer with the same firm—a small office that does a lot of free work for poor people. Mom is smart, feisty, and concerned about injustice. She wants to change the world, and she was meant to be a crusading lawyer. She finished a year of law school, but had to quit when she became pregnant with Miranda. Mom does what she must in order to support her family, but her sense of discontent shows up in small ways, such as wearing outrageous clothing to work, and taking office supplies. Miranda hopes winning the money will help her mother to a more fulfilling, contented life—which in Mom's case means going back to law school.)
3. "The name Miranda stands for people's rights," (Mom) said last fall, when I was upset because Robbie B. had told me during gym that I was named after a kidnapper. ("Things You Hide," p. 7)
(Despite their love for each other, Miranda and her mother are frequently in conflict, and their relationship is evolving as Miranda becomes more autonomous and begins to question her mother's actions and judgment. A symbol of this conflict is the name "Miranda," which is derived from a famous U.S. Supreme Court ruling in which the defendant's conviction was overturned because the police had not warned him of his legal rights. The ruling—hailed as a victory by many liberal civil rights advocates, but viewed as an outrage by many who were concerned with controlling crime and protecting victims—led to the famous disclaimer police must recite to defendants, which begins, "You have the right to remain silent. ..." Mom views the name "Miranda" as a beautiful symbol of freedom, while Miranda, influenced by Robbie B.—whose father is a prosecutor—sees it negatively, as being "named after a kidnapper.")
4. "The story. Tell me the story. From the beginning."
 So I started telling her about it, starting with the first scene, where Meg wakes up at night, afraid of a thunderstorm. ("Things You Hide," p. 8)
(Miranda is reading A Wrinkle in Time to her friend

Belle, who owns the grocery store near her apartment. Belle is part of the neighborhood community that serves as a sort of urban extended family for Miranda and her mother. The famous science fiction book by Madeleine L'Engle, with its themes of time travel and the power of love, is one of the major threads running through the story.)

5. "She met Louisa, who didn't have a husband either, in the lobby on that first day. They were both taking garbage to the big cans out front. Louisa was holding Sal. Sal had been crying, but when he saw me, he stopped. ("The Speed Round," p. 15)
(Miranda and Sal have been friends literally since they were babies. They have been neighbors and companions their entire lives, and still live in the same apartment building, which makes Sal's sudden breaking off of the relationship that much harder for Miranda. The fact that the story of their meeting is one Miranda has requested many times is an indicator of the depth of her love for her friend.)
6. Losing Sal was like a long list of bad things, and somewhere in the top half of the list was the fact that I had to walk home alone past the crazy guy on our corner. ("Things That Kick," p. 16)
(Miranda is introduced to "the laughing man," the mysterious homeless person who hangs out near the mailbox on her corner, babbling strange words and practicing kicking motions in the direction of busy Amsterdam Avenue. Of course, Miranda doesn't learn until much later that the man is actually Marcus, come back from the future, and that his kicking is in preparation for saving Sal's life. Ironically, the presence of the laughing man—a "bad thing" in Miranda's eyes—turns out to be a very good thing indeed, just like the separation from Sal.)
7. When he first showed up on our corner last fall, the laughing man was always mumbling under his breath. ... He said it like a chant: *bookbag, pocketshoe, bookbag, pocketshoe*. And sometimes he would be hitting himself on the head with his fists. ("Things That Kick," p. 18)
(Ironically, what seems to be ranting is actually the laughing man/Marcus reciting the "proofs" he's going to give Miranda so she'll believe his story; he appears to be insane because of the toll that time travel has taken on his mind.)
8. The day Sal got punched, the boys by the garage were hanging out, as usual. The day before, there

had been a fight, with one of them slamming another one up against a parked car and hitting him. The kid getting hit had both his hands up like he was saying "Enough!", but every time he tried to get off the hood of that car the other kid pushed him down and hit him again. ("Things That Stain," p. 22)

(Although Miranda doesn't realize it until much later in the narrative, the previous day's fight is the precipitating incident in the chain of events leading to Sal's accident and the rescue by Marcus/the laughing man. The boy being hit is Marcus's older brother, and he later berates Marcus for failing to intervene. His assertion that one day Marcus will have to hit someone and deal with the consequences leads to Marcus' experimental punching of Sal, which in turn causes Sal to be terrified of Marcus and to run from him into oncoming traffic on the fateful day on Amsterdam Avenue. As a result, Marcus must find a way to travel back in time to save Sal—and himself—from the consequences of his actions. If Marcus doesn't return as the laughing man and sacrifice himself to rescue Sal, Sal will be killed and the younger Marcus will go to prison, effectively destroying two young lives. The next day—the day Marcus punches Sal—is also the day Miranda believes is the end of her friendship with Sal.)

9. I have my own trick. If I'm afraid of someone on the street, I'll turn to him (it's always a boy) and say, "Excuse me, do you happen to know what time it is?" This is my way of saying to the person, "I see you as a friend, and there is no need to hurt me or take my stuff. Also, I don't even have a watch and I am probably not worth mugging." ("Mom's Rules for Life in New York City," pp. 25-26)
(Miranda lives in a different era than that of today, when kids had much more freedom and autonomy. Even so, Mom has inculcated in Miranda some "rules" to help avoid being a crime victim. These rules mainly involve being alert and suspicious of others, limiting contact with strangers, and avoiding traps. However, reflecting her essentially friendly nature, and her innocent trust in the decency of others, Miranda has created an additional rule—confront the threatening-looking person and try to enlist his goodwill. This approach is almost the direct opposite of what Mom advises, and creates an issue later on when Mom is angry with Miranda for giving the laughing man her sandwich. However, Miranda believes this approach has "worked like gangbusters" so far, and she's learned that "most people

I'm afraid of are actually very friendly." Later in the story, she tries this approach successfully with both the young and old Marcus. This is another manifestation of Miranda's subtle conflict with Mom; the fears of Mom, who knows bad things can happen, collide with Miranda's childlike optimism. Interestingly, Miranda shares her trust in men's goodness with her Shakespearean namesake, the heroine of The Tempest.)

10. I figure it's because I never had a father that I don't want one now. A person can't miss something she never had. ("Things You Wish For," pp. 27-28) *(Miranda's statement is true—in contrast to most single-parent children of fiction, she really isn't pining for a father. She is a normal, well-adjusted kid who is generally satisfied with her extended New York family of close friends and neighborhood protectors. Although Richard, Mom's boyfriend, is a stable influence in Miranda's life and fills an important quasi-parental role, his function is more that of a wise older friend than a father figure. The appeal of A Wrinkle in Time for Miranda is not the hunt for a parent, but the concept of time travel itself.)*
11. The truth is that our hopes are already up. Our wish list is stuck to the fridge with a magnet Mom stole from work. ... Richard and I have our own secret plan for the money. ("Things You Wish For," p. 29) *(One of the threads running through the story is Mom's efforts to prepare for her stint on The \$20,000 Dollar Pyramid. Although Mom cautions Miranda and Richard not to get their hopes up, they have already mentally spent the money. While letting Mom think they want luxury items or travel, they have already hatched a "secret plan"—which involves having Mom benefit from her winnings by realizing her dream to return to law school.)*
12. "I've got to go," I said, and I didn't let myself glance back until I got to the corner. When I did, the kid who punched Sal was gone. That was when I realized that he must live in the apartment over the garage, the one with dead plants on the fire escape and bed sheets hanging over the windows. ("Things That Sneak Up on You," p. 31) *(The day after Marcus punches Sal, Sal stays home from school and Miranda walks alone. As she approaches her apartment, she sees Marcus walking on the sidewalk. Before fear can paralyze her, she turns to him and implements her "rule" for dealing with strangers—the one about asking the time. He is*

very civil to her, and she realizes that he isn't dangerous, but also feels guilty for being friendly with Sal's attacker. Nevertheless, Miranda's generally positive assessment of people is affirmed, and we begin to see that Marcus is not the person he first appears to be. Perhaps her openness to others is one of the reasons Marcus picks her as his ally in time travel.)

13. I was lucky, I guess, that this was the same week Julia decided to punish Annemarie for something. The girls at school had been hurting each other's feelings for years before Sal left me and I was forced to really notice them. ... I had seen which ones tortured Alice Evans, who, even though we'd started sixth grade, still waited too long to pee and never wanted to say out loud that she had to go. ("Things That Bounce," p. 33) *(Miranda is an acute and astute observer of the social scene in her sixth-grade class, and she has known many of her classmates since early childhood. The rift with Sal forces her to become more aware of her social milieu, and requires her to engage with people she previously avoided. While this is uncomfortable for her, it is ultimately quite beneficial, widening her circle of friends, causing her to develop more compassion for kids like Alice Evans, and recognizing that people such as Julia are much more than what they may seem on the surface.)*
14. My first memory of Julia is from second grade, when we made self-portraits in art. She complained there was no "café au lait"-colored construction paper for her skin, or "sixty-percent-cacao-chocolate" color for her eyes. I remember staring at her while these words came out of her mouth, and thinking, Your skin is light brown. Your eyes are dark brown. Why don't you just use brown, you idiot? ... But I soon found out that Julia wasn't like the rest of us. ("Things That Bounce, p. 34) *(Julia really is different, but not necessarily in the way Miranda believes when the story begins. Miranda's problem with Julia has to do with envy over Julia's affluence and a perception that she is "spoiled"—a "princess" who seems to expect special treatment. Miranda eventually discovers that despite her affluence and "princess" demeanor, Julia is still the victim of racism and suffers from having an unsupportive and distant mother. Julia is fascinated by science and is the only one who appears to understand time on the same level as Marcus; perhaps she is as scientifically brilliant as he is. Julia is also a fierce friend, as evidenced by her protectiveness*

toward Annemarie even when it appears that Annemarie has “dumped” her. Further, Julia and Marcus grow up to be life partners. Miranda discovers most of this late in the story, after she and Julia become friends.)

15. The dentist put a hand on my shoulder and smiled again. He was like a professional smiler, which makes sense for a dentist, I guess. “My services don’t cost anything, Miranda. Some families don’t have the money to pay a dentist. ...” “Oh.” I was thinking I shouldn’t let my mother find out about this. ... I bet she would have me signed up for the dentist at school in no time. (“Things You Keep Secret,” p. 46)
(Miranda’s grade school has a free dental clinic for kids whose families are not well-off. This is a program provided by the school system, which pays the dentist’s salary. Miranda is enlisted as a “runner,” which means she takes hall passes to classrooms so students can be excused for appointments. This is how she meets Marcus Heilbroner and discovers he goes to her school. She also learns why he punched Sal; that he is brilliant; and that, despite his difficulty connecting with other people, he is generally decent and well-meaning—what the dentist later calls “a good kid, through and through.” Miranda’s understanding of A Wrinkle in Time and Marcus’ realization that she’s “a pretty smart kid” no doubt make her seem, to the older Marcus, like a likely candidate for help with his time-travel project. The runner job proves fortuitous later in the book, after Marcus is falsely accused of chasing Sal into traffic, when Miranda colludes with the dentist to keep Marcus holed up in the office until Mom can arrive and call off the police. Another thread running through the comment is Miranda’s awareness of where she stands economically in relation to the other kids, and her dread of being revealed as poor.)
16. “My God, what does it matter? It’s a story—someone made it up! You do realize that, don’t you?” He shrugged. “The story is made up. But time travel is possible. In theory. I’ve read some articles about it.” (“Things You Keep Secret,” p. 48)
(Miranda has an argument with Marcus about the authenticity of A Wrinkle in Time’s depiction of time travel. Marcus points out that Meg and her family should have seen themselves arrive in the garden. The exchange with Miranda highlights how time travel is a reality—not just science fiction—for Marcus, the mathematical and scientific genius.)

17. Mom says each of us has a veil between ourselves and the rest of the world, like a bride wears on her wedding day, except this kind of veil is invisible. We walk around happily with these invisible veils hanging down over our faces. The world is kind of blurry, and we like it that way. But sometimes our veils are pushed away for a few moments. ... And when the veil lifts, we can see the world as it really is, just for those few seconds before it settles down again. ... I’ve thought a lot about those veils. I wonder if, every once in a while, someone is born without one. Someone who can see the big stuff all the time. Like maybe you. (“Things You Push Away,” pp. 71-72)
(The “veil” Miranda is talking about refers to perceiving reality. The idea is that most people only see the surfaces of things, or the part of life that affects them personally, and miss the big picture and the underlying causes of events. Writing from a position of understanding, Miranda now realizes that Marcus perceives things as they really are, not just as they appear—and that maybe he was born with this ability, lacking a “veil.”)
18. Mom says that jail is a hard place, and that it can make people hard, too. ... Her bringing the chips and cookies is supposed to help somehow. It’s not really the cookies, she says. It’s the fact that someone brings them. (“Silly Things,” p. 85)
(Mom makes a monthly visit to the women’s jail downtown, where she talks to pregnant inmates about pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood; she takes them unused packs of cookies and chips that the nursing home where Louisa works is required by law to throw out, even though they’re perfectly good. Mom channels her energy as a crusader for the downtrodden into activities such as the inmate group and the tenants’ association. This discussion about the effects of jail also influences Miranda’s actions later in the book, when she enlists Mom to help save Marcus from incarceration; she realizes that going to jail would destroy Marcus.)
19. “You need the jacket with the hood,” Mom rasped from her bed. Her voice never sounded normal until after coffee. “Look in the front closet.” She seemed to think that it was really helpful to lie in bed, listening to the radio and calling out weather reports. I couldn’t help thinking about how, in my book, Meg’s mother had French toast waiting for Meg in the morning. She was a single mom too, with Meg’s dad being held prisoner halfway across

the universe. ("The Third Note," p. 97)
(A typical adolescent, Miranda is constantly comparing herself to others—even to fictional characters. Of course, she thinks that her real-life mother doesn't measure up to the fictional Meg's mom, or to her friends' parents. Obviously, however, other people's lives—even in books—aren't nearly as wonderful and perfect as they appear from the outside. After all, even Meg, the heroine of A Wrinkle in Time, has problems; she has to travel all over the universe to find her father, overcome all sorts of difficulties, and risk death for herself and her family members. Still, Miranda focuses on the fact that her mother made her French toast.)

20. He looked up at me, and suddenly he seemed familiar again. It was something about the way his eyes took me in. He said, "I'm an old man, and she's gone now. So don't worry, okay?"

"I won't."

He nodded. "Smart kid." ("Things You Give Away," p. 114)

(Miranda has just given the laughing man—the strange homeless man who lives outside her apartment—her sandwich. His words, which sound odd and pointless, take on new meaning by the end of the story, when she realizes that he was, indeed, an elderly version of Marcus, and that "she's gone now" refers to Julia.)

21. I opened the front cover. The writing was big and swoopy, beautiful. Nothing like yours.

Miranda,

Tesser well.

Madeleine L'Engle

Christmas Day: Tesser well. Your second proof.

It wasn't a game, I realized. ("The Second Proof," p. 135)

(For Christmas, Richard gets Miranda a first edition of A Wrinkle in Time, signed by the author—a treasure. The gift explains the stranger's cryptic second proof: "Christmas Day: Tesser Well." This is the event that ultimately convinces Miranda that what she's experiencing is real, and that time travel is somehow possible.)

22. She flopped down on her shaggy pink wall-to-wall carpeting, glanced at her digital clock, and reached out automatically to turn on the TV. And I realized that we probably spent our afternoons the same exact way. Except I can at least get my mother on the phone. Julia's apartment is a lot

nicer than ours, but I'm pretty sure there's no phone in the closet. ("Things That Are Sweet," p. 156)

(After Miranda and Julia declare a truce in their long-running war, Miranda visits Julia and they become friends, eventually forming a trio with Annemarie.

Although she is at home when Julia arrives from school, Julia's mother barely interacts with her daughter, preferring instead to engage in such self-centered pursuits as meditation in the closet.

Miranda comes to realize that, obvious differences in affluence aside, she and Julia are not so different after all, and that in some ways she has it better than Julia. This is a big breakthrough for Miranda—she is learning to look past the surface, which includes such things as appearance and wealth, to discern the underlying truth about a person.)

23. And then, in the who-knows-what year, ... Marcus will come back. You will come back. ... You will save Sal. ... Marcus is the magic thread. You are the laughing man. You are Marcus. Marcus is the laughing man. Or he will be, when he's old.

"None of it makes sense!" my brain yelled.

"But all of it is true," I answered. ("Magic Thread," p. 189)

(In a flash of insight—what Mom would call a "lifting of the veil"—Miranda sees the connection between all the strange events surrounding Marcus, Sal, the laughing man, and herself. Marcus, she realizes, connects everything. Although it is difficult for Miranda to see time as a huge loop, the way Marcus sees it, she understands that it is true: Marcus is a time traveler.)

24. We take the bus home because we think it'll be so much fun to take the bus home, knowing that we are rich now and can take a cab anytime we want. And it is fun. Sal and I don't talk much, but we lean into the turns the way we used to when we were little and actually believed that we could make the bus tip over. ("Things That Open," p. 190)
(Mom has won the "big money" on The \$20,000 Pyramid—\$12,100, which would be the equivalent of about \$50,000 to \$60,000 thirty years later, in 2009. It is a huge sum of money for the household, and one that will enable Mom to go back to school and realize her dream of becoming a lawyer.)

25. My letter is almost finished now. Very soon, I will bring it to Marcus, just like you asked. There are things I could tell him. ...

But I've decided I won't say much. I'll just hand him my letter and say, "Try not to land in the broccoli." He'll understand. He's a smart kid. ("Parting Gifts," p. 197)

(As Miranda nears completion of the story, she reflects on what she's learned, and thinks about what she should tell Marcus. She decides to let him read the account for himself, and draw his own conclusions. The ending perfectly ties together the loose ends of the story, and ties it to its inspiration, A Wrinkle in Time, with the reference to landing in the broccoli.)

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 from the book.

1. At the end of the story, Miranda says she'll tell Marcus to "Try not to land in the broccoli" as she hands him her letter. What is she talking about? Where did she get the idea of landing in the broccoli?
(Early in the story, Miranda and Marcus have a discussion about the nature of time and the possibility of time travel, using Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time as a reference. In that book, the Murry children, returning from their time-travel adventure, land in the middle of the family's vegetable garden—in the broccoli. "Try not to land in the broccoli" is Miranda's humorous way of preparing Marcus for the letter while letting him know she now shares his belief in the possibility of time travel.)
2. Why does Sal "leave" Miranda? Is it for the reason Miranda thinks it is? How is the situation resolved, and how does each friend change as a result?
(Answers will vary. As Sal explains after the accident, he "left" Miranda because he wanted to make new friends and "hang out" with people of his own gender sometimes—and not, as Miranda had supposed, because Marcus punched him. He had previously tried to hint to Miranda that he needed a change, but she hadn't listened. Although the separation is painful for Miranda, it has a positive effect, forcing both children to expand their circle of friends and their personal horizons. Sal and Miranda eventually mend fences and became friends again, although not as exclusively as before.)
3. Why do Wheelie, Miranda, and the dentist conspire to hide the young Marcus from the police after the accident in which the laughing man/Marcus is killed? What role does Mom play?
(Answers will vary. Everyone colludes to keep Marcus from the police, knowing that he is innocent of wrongdoing but that to be involved in the legal system could cause him terrible harm. Miranda is especially sensitive to this, due to Mom's efforts to help incarcerated pregnant women; Mom has told Miranda that jail can change people for the worse. Mom pretends to be a lawyer—a job she was born to do—to prevent the police from interrogating Marcus without his parents present, and to collect affidavits from witnesses verifying that the incident was an accident, thereby getting him off the hook.)
4. What is the initial cause of the rift between Jimmy and his lunchtime employees? After he relents, what finally ends the arrangement?
(Jimmy initially fires Miranda, Annemarie, and Colin because he thinks, wrongly, that they have stolen his precious Fred Flintstone bank, which is loaded with folded \$2 bills. In reality, Marcus/the laughing man has stolen it so he can buy food, something Miranda doesn't realize until much later. However, when the three sixth-graders make peace with Jimmy, he gives them an ultimatum: they can continue to work there as long as their friend, Julia, stays out of the store. The kids realize that Jimmy assumes, because Julia is part black, that she is a thief, even though Julia is nothing of the kind and is likely more wealthy than Jimmy. Annemarie, in particular, is outraged. Once they are aware of Jimmy's racism, the three quit the arrangement permanently.)
5. At one point, Julia confronts Miranda over her long-standing antagonism; she also blames Miranda for Annemarie's recurrence of seizures. Are Julia's accusations true? What comes about as a result of this confrontation? What does Miranda learn about Annemarie that she didn't know?
(Answers will vary. Julia's accusation that Miranda has hated her since the third grade is true; Miranda has long thought Julia was obnoxious and spoiled, and has been angry that she seems to gloat about her wealth. On the other hand, Miranda didn't know that Annemarie has epilepsy and must eat a special diet that excludes bread, so it is unfair to blame her for Annemarie's decision to spend six weeks throwing away her special lunches and eating sandwiches from Jimmy's instead. In the short term, the con-

frontation seems to cause even more hostility, but it serves to clear the air and ultimately leads to Miranda proposing a truce. Eventually, Miranda, Julia, and Annemarie become good friends.)

6. It bothers Miranda that Julia and Annemarie are much more affluent than she is, and she acknowledges to herself that, insignificant as this fact is in the great scheme of things, it is still important to her. Does she resolve this issue? If so, how? *(Miranda is plagued by the feeling that it is unfair for Julia and Annemarie to have so much when she has relatively little. Her first step in dealing with these feelings is to acknowledge that they are real and that they are important to her. A breakthrough comes after Miranda befriends the two girls and discovers that, despite their prettier rooms and nicer apartment buildings, their lives are imperfect as well—and in some ways not as good as hers. The key for Miranda is seeing her friends as individuals, and not in terms of wealth or social status. An added plus for Miranda comes when Mom wins the “big money” on The \$20,000 Pyramid; the \$12,100 (around \$60,000 in today’s terms), along with Richard moving in and Mom returning to law school, put Miranda’s family on a different financial footing.)*

7. Discuss the idea, ascribed to Mom, that most people have a “veil” that shields them from the world. What does this mean? Is it possible to move the veil? Which character(s) might be without a veil, and why? *(According to Miranda, Mom believes that most people spend their lives behind a “veil” that hides what’s really going on. The veil is a metaphor for a perceptual filter that obscures reality; to see “without the veil” means to see things as they really are, in all their sometimes overwhelming meaning and magnitude. Living is much easier with the veil in place. However, says Miranda, “sometimes our veils are pushed away for a few moments, like there’s a wind blowing it from our faces. And when the veil lifts, we can see the world as it really is, just for those few seconds before it settles down again. We see all the beauty, and cruelty, and sadness, and love. But mostly we are happy not to.” According to Mom, some people learn to lift the veil for themselves, and so can see reality; Miranda speculates that some people, like Marcus, may be born without a veil. In this sense, living without the veil is also a metaphor for genius. The people in the story who are able to see without the veil include Marcus, Julia, Miranda, and Mom.)*

8. Miranda’s name is a source of conflict between mother and daughter. How was her name chosen? What other sources for the name are suggested? How do Miranda and her mother’s attitudes reflect their differing perspectives? *(Answers will vary. Miranda was named for a famous U.S. Supreme Court ruling, Miranda v. Arizona (1966), which required that police make sure an arrested person understands his constitutional rights; it is the source of the famous warning that begins, “You have the right to remain silent.” A secondary source for her name is the sole female character in Shakespeare’s play The Tempest. The name is beautiful to Mom—who is an advocate for the downtrodden and dispossessed—because it “stands for people’s rights”; Miranda, on the other hand, focuses on the fact that the defendant in the case, Ernesto Miranda, was a felon who was convicted of kidnapping and other violent crimes. This reflects differences in perspective: Mom is focused on translating abstract virtues like “rights,” “freedom,” and “justice” into reality, and sees the world as a potentially unsafe place requiring vigilance and activism to protect the weak from being mistreated. Twelve-year-old Miranda, on the other hand, sees the world as a safe place where people are “actually very friendly” (p. 26), and is primarily concerned with fitting in with her peers. Interestingly, the Miranda of When You Reach Me shares some characteristics with her Shakespearean namesake. Like the sheltered daughter of the magician Prospero, the Miranda of 1970s Manhattan has limited real-world experience and tends to assume that all people are basically good; and like her Shakespearean counterpart, Miranda is on the cusp of big discoveries about life. By the end of the novel, Miranda and Mom have reached a new, largely unspoken agreement that balances personal safety with openness to the world.)*

9. When she finally figures out what has happened, Miranda feels sorry for Marcus, whose fate seems tragic to her. Do you agree? Do you think Marcus feels the same way? Explain. *(Answers will vary. Some may agree with Miranda that it is tragic to have a preview of one’s own death, and to die in such a gruesome fashion, spending one’s final days living on the street as a homeless person. However, from another perspective, Marcus has lived a long life of evident love and accomplishment, and will die having had the time-travel adventure of a lifetime, knowing that he has died heroically and prevented a terrible tragedy. The older Marcus*

seems perfectly cheerful about his fate, and tries to reassure Miranda that Julia has passed away and he has lived a long life, "So don't worry, okay?")

10. What elements of *When You Reach Me* are fantasy? What elements appear to be realistic? *(Answers will vary. In general, all the aspects relating to time travel as a real phenomenon, including the story of Marcus's travels and the mysterious notes, are fantasy. The rest of the story, focusing on the day-to-day lives of middle-schoolers and their families in late 1970s New York City—including the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by ordinary middle-class kids—appear to be quite realistic. Interestingly, there are many elements relating to the fantasy subplot that are themselves realistic—including the mentally ill homeless man and the stalker, both manifestations of the older Marcus.)*
11. What renewal, or rebirth, comes about as a result of Marcus/the laughing man's sacrifice? *(Answers will vary. Possible answers include the saving of Sal's life and the redemption of Marcus'; the restoration, precipitated by the trauma of Sal's accident, of Miranda and Sal's friendship; and, perhaps, an unarticulated renewal of Miranda's faith that things happen for a reason, and she has an important role to play.)*

Across the Curriculum

Geography

1. Locate Amsterdam Avenue on a map of Manhattan. Draw the intersections closest to where the action occurs, and mark the rough location of Sal's accident.
2. Using a map of Manhattan, trace the route from Miranda's neighborhood to the studios where *The \$20,000 Pyramid* is taped. Then, trace the route from Miranda's neighborhood to the prison downtown where Mom counsels women prisoners.

Social Studies

1. Miranda and her friends live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Research the history of this area of New York City. What are its characteristics? Have the demographics of the area changed since the 1970s? If so, how?
2. One of Mom's activities involves heading the renter's association in her apartment building. Research

the history of tenants' rights in the United States, and especially in New York City. Have the laws regarding tenants' rights changed since the 1970s? In general, do tenants in New York have more rights, or fewer, than tenants in other parts of the country? Explain.

Psychology/Health

1. Although the story explains Marcus/the laughing man's strange behavior as a consequence of his time travel, he appears to Miranda and others to be simply a mentally ill man let loose on the streets of New York. Research mental illness, including schizophrenia, and discuss its relationship to homelessness among single adults in the United States. To what extent does mental illness contribute to the problem? Do current laws make it difficult or easy to help such people? Since the 1970s, have there been any changes in laws about vagrancy and homelessness in New York? Explain.

Science

1. Research current scientific thinking on the nature of time and the possibility of time travel. Is this something that might be possible in the foreseeable future, or is it still the purview of science fiction? Explain.
2. Read Julia's explanation of time as being like her diamond ring. Is this an accurate view from a scientific viewpoint? Explain.

Alternate Assessment

1. One of the things readers may notice about *When You Reach Me* is the degree of independence enjoyed by the children in the novel. In interviews, author Rebecca Stead has said she deliberately set the book in the past to show children with a great deal more autonomy than most kids now enjoy. Currently, a few parents, mainly in New York and other cities, have started a movement toward so-called "free-range parenting," arguing that the benefits of allowing kids to have more freedom of movement outweigh considerations such as safety. Research on the internet, then give a brief report on the pros and cons of this approach; finally, state your opinion on whether or not this is a good idea.
2. In an essay, discuss various scientific theories of time travel. Do scientists currently think time travel may be possible? Why or why not?

3. Choose three events in the story, and explain in two or three paragraphs how they are pivotal.
4. Writers use “sensory details” to help the reader see, hear, smell, taste, and feel what is being described. Give examples of the author’s use of such sensory details.
5. In a short essay, trace the development of time travel in Western literature since the 19th century. Be sure to mention both *A Wrinkle in Time* and H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*.

Vocabulary Test

Match each vocabulary word or term from *When You Reach Me* in the left-hand column with its definition in the column on the right. Place the letter of your answer in the space provided.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. tesser | a. lawbreaker; wrongdoer |
| _____ 2. epilepsy | b. a renter |
| _____ 3. prejudice | c. plant from which chocolate is made |
| _____ 4. responsibility | d. a neurological disorder characterized by seizures |
| _____ 5. civil rights | e. art form based on paper-folding |
| _____ 6. criminal | f. famous person |
| _____ 7. doorman | g. someone noted for nobility, courage, and outstanding achievement |
| _____ 8. teleportation | h. not real; fake, manmade |
| _____ 9. tenant | i. bigotry or hatred against others, especially those perceived as different |
| _____ 10. origami | j. youngster who is home alone after school |
| _____ 11. cacao | k. being accountable |
| _____ 12. latchkey child | l. someone on duty at the entrance to a building |
| _____ 13. celebrity | m. movement of objects by means of technological or paranormal means |
| _____ 14. hero | n. to travel |
| _____ 15. artificial | o. rights of citizens to freedom and equality |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- _____ 1. Miranda and her friends have a job here
- _____ 2. Works in a nursing home
- _____ 3. Eats a special diet
- _____ 4. Mom is training for this
- _____ 5. Reads math books for fun
- _____ 6. Compares time to a ring
- _____ 7. Attended law school for a year
- _____ 8. Where the story takes place
- _____ 9. Miranda's friend since babyhood
- _____ 10. Mom's nickname for Richard

- a. Marcus
- b. *The \$20,000 Pyramid*
- c. Sal
- d. Annemarie
- e. Mom
- f. Manhattan
- g. Louisa
- h. Julia
- i. "Mr. Perfect"
- j. Jimmy's

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Miranda longs for a dad
- _____ 2. Richard is a lawyer
- _____ 3. The laughing man is a danger to local kids
- _____ 4. Sal understands that Marcus is harmless
- _____ 5. Wheelie runs the school
- _____ 6. Annemarie has epilepsy
- _____ 7. Miranda is wealthy compared to Julia
- _____ 8. The mysterious notes frighten Miranda
- _____ 9. Mom wins \$20,000 on the show
- _____ 10. Miranda calls herself a "latchkey child"

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

For the following quotes, identify the speaker and explain the meaning and importance of the quote.

1. "The name Miranda stands for people's rights." ("Things You Hide," p. 7)

2. "Knock, knock! ... I'm on deadline. ... When I'm on deadline, I cook. Do you like mustard? Try the dipping sauce." ("Things That Burn," p. 38)

3. "It doesn't matter whether they knew it. That's got nothing to do with it. ... If they landed in the broccoli at eight-twenty-five, they should be in the broccoli at eight-twenty-five. Period." ("Things You Keep Secret," pp. 50-51)

4. "Some things are in the blood. All the money in the world can't change a person's blood." ("Things That Fall Apart," p. 129)
5. "Really? Because I think it's kind of ugly. My mom picked it. ... She picked out all this stuff. And she won't let me put up my outer-space posters." ("Things That Are Sweet," p. 155)
6. "I still like you! Of course I still like you. I just needed to—I don't know, take a break for a while." ("Things That Heal," p. 165)

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Discuss how Miranda's outlook changes through the course of the book. What conflicts does she face at the outset? How do her experiences after Sal leaves her and the notes begin change her perspective? What does she learn about herself and others that will enable her to be more successful and confident going forward?
2. *A Wrinkle in Time*, the book to which *When You Reach Me* refers, is as much about the power of love as it is about time travel. In a brief essay, discuss to what extent *When You Reach Me* is also about the power of love to overcome evil or difficulties.
3. In the novel, there are several instances where outcomes might have been much different if the characters had chosen to communicate with each other in a reasonable way; one of the themes is the need to take responsibility for sometimes wrong choices. Pick one of the following instances, and discuss how the story might have been altered if the behaviors had changed:
 - Miranda had let Sal know that Marcus was a good and "safe" kid, despite the punching incident.
 - Annemarie had been honest about her health problems and dietary restrictions and hadn't eaten the bread from Jimmy's.
 - Sal had been honest with Miranda from the beginning about his reasons for "leaving" her.
 - Marcus hadn't attempted time travel and so had not been present to save Sal.
 - Marcus had not tried the punching "experiment" to begin with, and instead had elected to take boxing lessons.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Use a word from the list below to complete each sentence. Put the corresponding letter in the blank provided.

1. Mom believes most people have a _____ between themselves and the world.
2. Richard's nickname is _____.
3. _____ works in a nursing home.
4. In third grade, Julia demands construction paper the color of _____ to represent her skin.
5. Annemarie can't eat bread because she has _____.
6. Sal nearly gets hit by a truck crossing _____ Avenue.
7. The laughing man is really _____ visiting from the future.
8. Richard and Miranda make plans for Mom's winnings on _____.
9. According to Mom, Mr. Tompkins, the teacher, is a frustrated _____.
10. Louisa says the game show's host, _____ never seems to get older.

- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| a. café au lait | b. Amsterdam | c. Mr. Perfect | d. architect |
| e. Marcus | f. epilepsy | g. Dick Clark | h. veil |
| i. Louisa | j. <i>The \$20,000 Pyramid</i> | | |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Identify the following characters, putting the letter of the correct answer in the blank provided.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Steals the Fred Flintstone bank |
| _____ | 2. Works in a law office but isn't yet a lawyer |
| _____ | 3. Has one leg shorter than the other |
| _____ | 4. Her father does the cooking |
| _____ | 5. Reads advanced mathematics texts for fun |
| _____ | 6. Helps Miranda hide Marcus from the police |
| _____ | 7. Runs the school |
| _____ | 8. Her mother meditates in the closet |
| _____ | 9. Brings cookies and chips from work |
| _____ | 10. Stopped crying when he first saw Miranda |

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| a. Annemarie | b. Sal | c. Mom | d. the dentist |
| e. Julia | f. Marcus/laughing man | g. Louisa | h. young Marcus |
| i. Wheelie | k. Richard | | |

Part III: Matching (20 points)

Complete the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| _____ | 1. Date of Mom's appearance on <i>The \$20,000 Pyramid</i> |
| _____ | 2. Mom is president of this |
| _____ | 3. Store near Miranda's apartment |
| _____ | 4. What nearly hit Sal |
| _____ | 5. Street Miranda and Sal must cross |
| _____ | 6. Owns a sandwich shop |
| _____ | 7. What Julia's mother does in the closet |
| _____ | 8. Game show host |
| _____ | 9. Julia says time is like this |
| _____ | 10. Annemarie's father's job |

- | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| a. truck | b. meditation | c. April 27, 1979 | d. Jimmy | e. illustrator |
| f. Dick Clark | g. Belle's | h. Amsterdam Avenue | i. tenants' association | j. diamond ring |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. After Sal starts avoiding her, Miranda is forced to make new friends among the other kids. Who are these friends? What new experiences does she have as a result of Sal's leaving? How does she grow and change in her perceptions of others?
2. In interviews, author Rebecca Stead has referred to her childhood desire to discover magic and to develop magical powers—a desire she eventually transferred to the “magic” of creating stories. Discuss the elements of science fiction and fantasy in *When You Reach Me*, and how Stead weaves these elements into a book about growing up.
3. Although Miranda is initially mistaken about Sal's reasons for leaving her, the painful event precipitates positive changes in her life, as well as a new understanding with Sal. Why was this change necessary for the two friends? Explain.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

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

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

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

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Quote Identification (30 points)

Answers will vary. Possible answers:

1. "The name Miranda stands for people's rights."
("Things You Hide," p. 7)
(This is Mom, explaining why she named Miranda after the famous Miranda warnings, which include the right to remain silent and the right to an attorney. Miranda has been arguing with her mother

because she believes she was named after a criminal. However, Mom, who wants to be a criminal defense lawyer, believes the name "Miranda," and the concept it represents, is beautiful because it stands for freedom and Americans' rights under the Constitution, concepts that are precious to her.)

2. "Knock, knock! ... I'm on deadline. ... When I'm on deadline, I cook. Do you like mustard? Try the dipping sauce." ("Things That Burn," p. 38)
(This is Annemarie's father, an illustrator who works from home. He does all the cooking for Annemarie, who must eat a special diet to help keep her epilepsy under control. With her illustrator father and working mother, Annemarie is much more affluent than Miranda, a fact that bothers Miranda even as she enjoys spending time at Annemarie's apartment.)
3. "It doesn't matter whether they knew it. That's got nothing to do with it. ... If they landed in the broccoli at eight-twenty-five, they should be in the broccoli at eight-twenty-five. Period." ("Things You Keep Secret," pp. 50-51)
(This is Marcus, having an argument with Miranda about the depiction of time travel in the book A Wrinkle in Time. He continues, based on his understanding of time travel, that Meg and her family did not return home five minutes before they left, contrary to the assertion in the Madeleine L'Engle book.)
4. "Some things are in the blood. All the money in the world can't change a person's blood." ("Things That Fall Apart," p. 129)
(The speaker is Jimmy, the proprietor of the snack shop where Miranda, Annemarie, and Colin have had their lunchtime job. "In the blood" is Jimmy's code for saying he believes people of color like Julia (who is part black) are natural criminals. This has come up in the wake of the incident in which Jimmy's precious Fred Flintstone bank filled with folded two-dollar bills is stolen. In reality, the older Marcus has stolen it so he can purchase food and stay alive until his opportunity to save Sal arrives; however, the racist Jimmy assumes it was Julia who stole the bank. The incident marks the end of the lunchtime job, since the kids won't work there anymore after they learn Jimmy's true colors.)
5. "Really? Because I think it's kind of ugly. My mom picked it. ... She picked out all this stuff. And she won't let me put up my outer-space posters."
("Things That Are Sweet," p. 155)

When You Reach Me

Rebecca Stead

(After Miranda compliments her room, Julia complains that her mother has decorated it in her own style, without any regard for Julia's interest in science and space. Although still envious and put off by Julia's affluence, Miranda is coming to realize that there's more to Julia than she thought, and that she has a better relationship with her mother than Julia does with hers.)

6. "I still like you! Of course I still like you. I just needed to—I don't know, take a break for a while."
("Things That Heal," p. 165)
(The speaker is Sal. Miranda is visiting him after the accident on Amsterdam Avenue. Sal is explaining that he is still friends with Miranda, but that he needed time away from her to make new friends and hang out with boys. Contrary to what Miranda had believed, Marcus' punching him hadn't precipitated the breakup.)

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

(Answers will vary.)

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- h
- c
- i
- a
- f
- b
- e
- j
- d
- g

Part II: Identification (20 points)

- f
- c
- k
- a
- h
- d
- j
- e
- g
- b

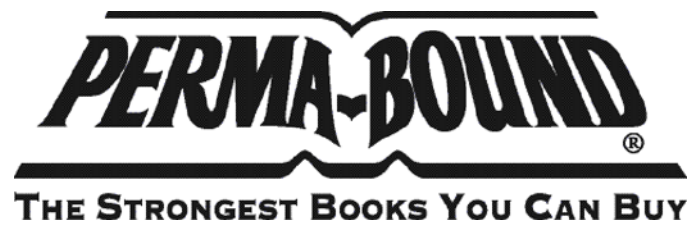
Part III: Matching (20 points)

- c
- i

- g
- a
- h
- d
- b
- f
- j
- e

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

(Answers will vary.)



Perma-Bound

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

Perma-Bound Canada

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

Visit us online at www.perma-bound.com