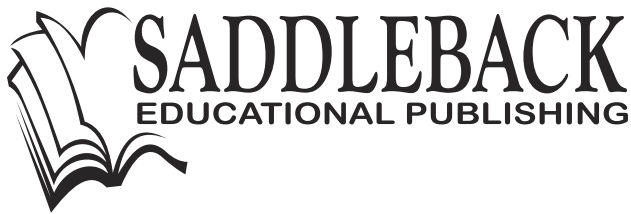


Focus **ON READING**

Wringer

MARSHALL K. HALL

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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference section for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the

book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Palmer LaRue dreads his tenth birthday. Being ten in his town of Waymer means taking on a role that Palmer is against—becoming a wringer. A wringer is a kid who wrings the necks of pigeons at the annual pigeon-shooting contest. Palmer has never understood why the townspeople shoot the pigeons. On Pigeon Day, five thousand captured pigeons are released into the sky and shot down by the town's men. If a shot pigeon is down but not dead, a wringer runs onto the field and puts it out of its misery.

At the start of the book, Palmer turns nine. He finds three new friends, Beans, Mutto, and Henry, who have ignored him up to this point. Now that he is older, they accept him into their group. They are all eager to turn ten, because that means they can be wringers. Palmer hides his feelings about being a wringer because he knows they will make fun of him. To Beans, Mutto, and Henry, being a wringer is the ultimate honor. Palmer lies to them, saying that he cannot wait to be a wringer.

When a pigeon lands on Palmer's windowsill, things are further complicated. Not only does Palmer have to hide his feelings about being a wringer, but he has to hide his pigeon friend, too. At first, he hopes the pigeon will go away, knowing what trouble it will bring to his newfound friendship with the guys. When the pigeon will not go away, Palmer becomes attached to him and gives him a name: Nipper. His daily routine completely changes to accommodate his new friend. Palmer has no idea how he can continue to house Nipper in a town that hates pigeons.

Eventually, Palmer confides in his neighbor Dorothy about Nipper. She hates Pigeon Day just as much as Palmer. Luckily, she is a girl and does not have to worry about becoming a wringer when she turns ten. Even though Palmer has tortured Dorothy with the guys in the past, she forgives him and embraces Nipper. They become much better friends, as she is the only one he can talk to about Nipper.

Each day, Palmer faces the problem of hiding Nipper from the guys. When things get too dangerous and Palmer realizes that the guys are close to discovering Nipper, he decides that he must set Nipper free. He knows that Beans and Mutto will not let Nipper survive if they get hold of him. He and Dorothy decide that she will let Nipper go at the seashore when she goes

on vacation with her family, just in time to avoid Pigeon Day.

When Palmer turns ten, he admits that he does not want to be a wringer, even though he knows it means the guys will turn against him. With Pigeon Day so close, he cannot take the pressure any longer. He knows he cannot be a wringer after having a pigeon as a pet.

On Pigeon Day, Palmer realizes that Dorothy set Nipper free at the railroad yards in the city, which is where they catch many of the pigeons to shoot. At this point, Palmer knows that Nipper is there. He is determined to find him. When a pigeon lands on Palmer's head, he knows it must be Nipper. Palmer stands up to everyone in Waymer by walking away with his pigeon. He overcomes his fears about what everyone thinks to save his best friend, Nipper.

About the Author

Jerry Spinelli was born in Norristown, Pennsylvania, on February 1, 1941. He grew up wanting to be many different things, including a cowboy and a major league baseball player, but he never imagined he would want to be an author. He spent very little time reading because he was so involved in sports, including baseball, football, track, and basketball. When Spinelli was sixteen in Norristown, his high school football team had an amazing victory over one of the best teams in the country. After the game, Spinelli went home and wrote a poem about it. When the poem was published in the local newspaper, it occurred to him that he could be a writer. Spinelli had no idea it would take twenty-five years to get his first book published.

Spinelli graduated from Gettysburg College and went on to further his education at Johns Hopkins University. He wrote four adult novels after college, but no one wanted to publish them. He wrote his fifth novel as an adult novel, too. Because of the thirteen-year-old main character, however, publishers saw *Space Station Seventh Grade* as a children's novel. Spinelli believes that he became a children's author by accident. In his mind, he writes for everyone.

Spinelli's novels are known for their humor and realistic characters. He draws many of his ideas for his books from real-life experiences. If he's not writing about a childhood memory, he writes about his six children and fifteen grandchildren. He also writes about

(continued)

Focus on the Book (continued)

his life in his autobiography, *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*.

Spinelli has over twenty novels published, including *Maniac Magee*, which won the 1991 Newbery Medal. *Wringer* was named a Newbery Honor book in 1998. Spinelli's books are highly acclaimed around the world. They have been published in various other languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Greek.

Spinelli currently lives in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Eileen, who is also a children's author, and two of their sons, Sean and Ben. When asked who his favorite author is, Spinelli replies, "Eileen Spinelli. Her stories and poem touch me."

Historical Background

Believe it or not, pigeon shootings do take place around the country. Jerry Spinelli's inspiration for *Wringer* came from a real pigeon-shooting contest he read about in the newspaper every year. He realized there was a story there, but he wasn't sure how to

get into it. Then he realized the best way to do it was through the eyes of kids. In order to learn about pigeons, Spinelli went to a park and studied the pigeons. He wanted to get firsthand experience, rather than reading about pigeons in a book.

Pigeons are not the only animals shot at a specific time in a community. Unlike the pigeons, however, deer or bear are sometimes hunted when they become a serious danger or problem to humans; in Waymer, the pigeons were actually rounded up for the express purpose of providing sport.

In the fictional town of Waymer, becoming a wringer at the age of ten is a rite of passage for boys. Many cultures have such systematic rituals, including hazing for clubs or fraternities (a practice now outlawed by many institutions), quinceañera parties (sweet fifteen), bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah, getting a driver's license, and so on.

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SAMPLE

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Focus Your Knowledge

Pigeon shootings take place in various parts of the country. Sometimes clay pigeons are used for target practice, but real pigeons are also used in many instances.

- Think about what you know about pigeons. If you know very little, do some research. Where are pigeons mostly found? Why do you think pigeons are chosen for shooting contests rather than other birds?
- Many animal rights advocates oppose pigeon shootings. Are you for or against these contests? Why?
- This book addresses issues of peer pressure. Have you ever pretended to be something you were not, just to belong to a particular group? Have you ever let others make decisions for you? Explain.
- This book is also about overcoming fears. What are some fears that you have overcome? How did you feel after the experience?

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Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

contradiction—implying the opposite or denial of

rollicking—moving or behaving in a carefree, joyous manner

meekest—least courageous and strong

careening—swaying from side to side

bluntly—in a straight and to-the-point manner

squeamish—queasy; easily sickened

disdainful—full of scorn

marvel (verb)—to become filled with surprise, wonder, or amazed curiosity

sly—clever, tricky

befuddled—confused

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

A **gutter** is a trough near the roof of a house that carries off rainwater.

A **sewer grate** is a barred frame in the street that covers the hole of a sewer.

A **hotfoot** is a cruel practical joke in which a match is put between the upper and the sole of someone's shoe and lighted.

A **sinkhole** is a hollow place or depression in the ground.

A **pip** is a person who is extraordinary.

A **hutch** is a type of chest or cupboard.

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Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. What is Palmer's biggest fear?
2. What makes Palmer's ninth birthday so special to him?
3. How do Palmer's parents feel about his new friends?
4. How does Palmer feel about the playground, and why?
5. What is Family Fest?

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Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “It had long seemed a curious **contradiction** to Palmer, that among three kids **rollicking** on the field, Henry was the tallest yet also the **meekest**.”

contradiction: _____

rollicking: _____

meekest: _____

2. “After a minute or two of lopsided, long-legged **careening**, Henry flopped to the ground.”

careening: _____

3. “‘She’s one of your best friends.’ . . .
‘She’s not,’ he told her **bluntly**.”

bluntly: _____

4. “The **squeamish** ones would pull back their hands as if from a hot stove, and they would shudder and squeak.”

squeamish: _____

5. “‘Good,’ she said with a **disdainful** sniff. Sometimes it amazed him that this girl, just out of third grade, could make him feel so little.”

disdainful: _____

6. “So he ran off and found others to **marvel** at his bruise.”

marvel: _____

7. “Palmer stood back and gave a **sly** grin.”

sly: _____

8. “At the same time she **befuddled** him. . . . What kind of girl was this?”

befuddled: _____

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. What color are a pigeon's eyes?
 - a. gray
 - b. orange
 - c. black
2. Of the three boys who attend Palmer's birthday party, who does his mom dislike the most?
 - a. Beans
 - b. Mutto
 - c. Henry
3. What does Palmer get for his birthday from Beans, Mutto, and Henry?
 - a. a banana peel, a cigarette butt, and a sock
 - b. an apple core, a sock, and a cigar butt
 - c. a sock, an apple core, and an old pipe
4. What is Palmer's new nickname?
 - a. Wringer
 - b. Snuffy
 - c. Snots
5. How old does Palmer turn on his birthday?
 - a. nine
 - b. eight
 - c. ten
6. Who is Fishface?
 - a. Henry's sister
 - b. Palmer's neighbor
 - c. Mutto's dog
7. What does Farquar use to mark a spot for The Treatment on Palmer's arm?
 - a. a marker
 - b. mud
 - c. tape
8. What does Palmer's dad give him for his birthday?
 - a. toy soldiers
 - b. a soccer ball
 - c. a BB gun
9. Who does not care about Palmer's bruise?
 - a. his dad
 - b. Henry
 - c. Dorothy
10. What happens the first week in August?
 - a. Palmer's birthday
 - b. school starts
 - c. Family Fest

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Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does Palmer's mother dislike Beans?
2. Why does Palmer hate the park?
3. What is "The Treatment"?
4. Where did Beans get his nickname?
5. What does Palmer's dad want him to do with the toy soldiers when he grows up?
6. What does Palmer have to overcome to become friends with Beans, Mutto, and Henry?
7. What does Palmer do to make his bruise last longer?
8. Why does Palmer dislike Dorothy?
9. Why does Palmer cry the night of his birthday?
10. Why is Palmer so frustrated with Dorothy?

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Deepen Your Understanding

The Treatment is a series of painful punches in the arm. In a paragraph, explain the reaction of the characters below to The Treatment that Palmer receives.

Palmer

Palmer's father

kids around town

Palmer's mother

Dorothy

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