



CRUEL NATURE

READING COMPREHENSION & CRITICAL THINKING

GRADES 5-7

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Florida State Standards

Grade 5

ELA.5.R.1.1

Analyze how setting, events, conflict, and characterization contribute to the plot in a literary text.

ELA.5.R.1.2

Explain the development of stated or implied theme(s) throughout a literary text.

ELA.5.R.1.3

Describe how an author develops a characters perspective in a literary text.

ELA.5.R.1.4

Explain how figurative language and other poetic elements work together in a poem.

Grade 6

ELA.6.R.1.1

Analyze how the interaction between characters contributes to the development of a plot in a literary text.

ELA.6.R.1.2

Analyze the development of stated or implied theme(s) throughout a literary text.

Grade 7

ELA.7.R.1.1

Analyze the impact of setting on character development and plot in a literary text.

ELA.7.R.1.2

Compare two or more themes and their development throughout a literary text.

The Hole

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. Where did the man find Penelope after she ran off?
 - A) In a shallow slough
 - B) In a hardwood hammock
 - C) Inside a Cracker house
 - D) At the edge of a clearing
2. What peculiar observation did the hunter make about Penelope while they were inside the house?
 - A) Her barking was unusually loud
 - B) Her coat appeared darker and she seemed larger
 - C) She refused to eat the food he offered
 - D) She started digging at the floor
3. What did the hunter notice about the wall in the main room?
 - A) It had strange symbols carved into it
 - B) It was covered in moss and mold
 - C) It had a jagged hole showing the woods outside
 - D) It was made of stone, unlike the rest of the house
4. How did the story describe the transformation of Penelope?
 - A) She grew larger, her fur became brindled black, and her paws turned into clawed hands
 - B) She shrank, her fur turned white, and her ears became pointed
 - C) She became transparent, like a ghost, and started floating
 - D) She sprouted wings and began to fly around the room
5. What was the hunter's reaction when he saw his other self through the hole in the wall?
 - A) He laughed, thinking it was a trick of the light
 - B) He calmly walked towards the figure
 - C) He froze in terror, unable to move
 - D) He immediately ran out of the house without looking back

Diving deeper

Answer each question by quoting a specific passage in the book. Included the page number.

1. Why did the hunter decide to seek shelter in the derelict Cracker house instead of returning home?
2. What strange changes did the hunter notice about Penelope as they settled in for the night?

3. What did the hunter discover when he looked through the hole in the wall?
4. Describe the transformation that Penelope underwent before the hunter was attacked.
5. What was the hunter's reaction when he saw himself running through the woods with a bloodied throat and chest?

Critical Thinking

1. How does the author use the setting of the Florida Everglades and the derelict Cracker house to build tension and create a sense of dread in the story?

Analyze how the environment contributes to the overall atmosphere and mood of the narrative.

2. Give one or two examples of foreshadowing in the story.
3. What do you think the jagged hole in the wall is?

The Hole Answer Key:

Reading Comprehension

1. B) *In a hardwood hammock*
2. B) *Her coat appeared darker and she seemed larger*
3. C) *It had a jagged hole showing the woods outside*
4. A) *She grew larger, her fur became brindled black, and her paws turned into clawed hands*
5. C) *He froze in terror, unable to move*

Diving deeper

1. Why did the hunter decide to seek shelter in the derelict Cracker house instead of returning home?

The hunter decided to seek shelter in the derelict Cracker house because it was almost completely dark, and he was weary from the long hike. He knew it was dangerous to trek through the swamp at night, so he chose to stay in the house and return home in the morning, despite the uneasy feeling he had.

2. What strange changes did the hunter notice about Penelope as they settled in for the night?

The hunter noticed that Penelope's coat seemed darker, with less tan among her black and tan patches, and she appeared larger and scruffier than usual. He initially dismissed it as an effect of the firelight or dirt she may have picked up while hunting.

3. What did the hunter discover when he looked through the hole in the wall?

When the hunter looked through the hole in the wall, he was astounded to see the woods outside, even though the other side of the hole should have been the small empty room of the house. This realization filled him with dread as it defied logic.

4. Describe the transformation that Penelope underwent before the hunter was attacked.

Penelope underwent a horrifying transformation, turning into a monstrous creature. Her fur became brindled black, her muscles bulged, and her paws turned into gruesome clawed hands. She grew to a towering height when she stood on her hind legs. Her muzzle elongated into a salivating maw filled with impossibly long, bloody fangs, and her eyes, once familiar, became cold and predatory.

5. What was the hunter's reaction when he saw himself running through the woods with a bloodied throat and chest?

The hunter was filled with horror and disbelief when he saw himself through the hole in the wall, running through the woods with a bloodied throat and chest. The sight of his terrified other self screaming "Run!" only intensified his fear. He was frozen in terror as the realization of the impossible situation took hold.

Critical Thinking

1. Setting and Atmosphere: *The author uses the setting of the Florida Everglades and the derelict Cracker house to create an overwhelming sense of isolation, danger, and dread. The Everglades, with its dense thickets, murky water, and unfamiliar terrain, already set a foreboding tone as the hunter is led*

deeper into the wilderness. The Cracker house, with its ruined, ashen wood planks and crumbling chimney, serves as a physical manifestation of decay and abandonment. The descriptions of dust-muted surfaces, cobwebs, and the collapsing chimney add to the sense of desolation and neglect. The house, nestled in a clearing where the dying light barely penetrates, evokes a feeling of being trapped in a place where the natural and supernatural worlds intersect. The eeriness is heightened by the strange behavior of Penelope, the unsettling noises outside, and the unnatural darkness inside the house. Together, these elements build tension, making the environment itself a character that contributes to the horror, amplifying the sense of dread and unease that permeates the narrative.

2. Examples of Foreshadowing:

- *Penelope's Transformation:* Early in the story, the hunter notices that Penelope's coat appears darker and that she seems larger and shaggier. This subtle change in the dog's appearance foreshadows her ultimate transformation into a monstrous creature. The hints that something is not quite right with Penelope build suspense and set the stage for the shocking reveal.

- *The Unnatural Silence:* The sudden absence of the usual nighttime sounds—the crickets, frogs, and other creatures—foreshadows the imminent supernatural events. This eerie silence is a classic horror trope, signaling that something is deeply wrong and that danger is near.

3. *The Jagged Hole in the Wall:* The jagged hole in the wall appears to be a supernatural portal or window that connects the physical world inside the Cracker house with another, possibly parallel, reality. When the hunter looks through it, he sees the woods outside, which should be impossible given the structure of the house. This hole seems to act as a conduit through which he glimpses both the past and future, including the terrifying vision of his own bloodied self running towards the house. The hole symbolizes the breakdown of the boundary between the natural and the supernatural, reality and nightmare. It's a focal point of the narrative's horror, emphasizing the inescapable, cyclical nature of the terror the hunter faces.

The Scritchity Scratch

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. What is the initial metaphor used for a thought in the poem?
 - A) A cloud
 - B) A bird
 - C) A star
 - D) A shadow
2. What kind of thoughts does the poem describe as bothersome?
 - A) Happy memories
 - B) Exciting ideas
 - C) Regretful memories
 - D) Dreams about sugar plums
3. What is the most dreadful thought described in the poem?
 - A) A memory of a lie
 - B) A fear of darkness
 - C) The thought of an evil creature
 - D) A broken window
4. What does the creature in the poem do once it is summoned?
 - A) It grants wishes
 - B) It sings songs
 - C) It hunts children
 - D) It gives gifts
5. How does the poem suggest the creature arrives?
 - A) Through the front door
 - B) By squeezing through a keyhole
 - C) By knocking on the window
 - D) By flying in through the chimney

Diving Deeper

1. What metaphor is used to describe a thought at the beginning of the poem, and how does this metaphor relate to the poem?
2. In the poem, what examples are given of "bothersome thoughts," and how do these thoughts affect the speaker?

3. What warning does the poem give about an "evil so stealthy and grim," and what are the consequences of summoning it.
4. How does the poem create a sense of suspense and fear as it progresses, especially towards the end? Analyze the language and imagery used to build tension and evoke a sense of dread in the reader.
5. How does the title contribute to establishing the tone of the poem and to the poem's climax?

Critical Thinking

1. How does the poem use imagery and descriptive language to create a sense of fear and suspense in the reader?
 - Analyze the specific words and phrases that contribute to the eerie and ominous tone of the poem.
2. What is the significance of the "Scritchity Scratch" being conjured by merely reading or thinking about it, and how does this concept relate to the theme of the power of thoughts?
 - Explore the idea of thoughts as powerful entities and how this theme is developed throughout the poem.
3. How does the poem contrast ordinary, everyday fears and regrets with the supernatural terror of the "Scritchity Scratch," and what does this contrast suggest about the nature of fear?
 - Discuss the relationship between common human fears and the monstrous entity in the poem, and what this reveals about the nature of fear itself.

The Scritchity Scratch Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. B) *A bird*
2. C) *Regretful memories*
3. C) *The thought of an evil creature*
4. C) *It hunts children*
5. B) *By squeezing through a keyhole*

Diving Deeper

1. **Metaphor for a Thought:** *At the beginning of the poem, a thought is metaphorically described as a bird that "lands on your head." This metaphor suggests that thoughts are sudden, intrusive, and not easily dismissed, much like a bird that unexpectedly lands on you. This metaphor relates to the poem's theme by emphasizing how thoughts, especially those that are bothersome or frightening, can invade one's mind without warning and can be difficult to shake off.*

2. **Examples of "Bothersome Thoughts:** *The poem describes bothersome thoughts as memories of past actions that one might regret, such as picking on a sibling or breaking a neighbor's window and lying about it. These thoughts cause discomfort and guilt, affecting the speaker by making them feel uneasy and troubled. The poem implies that these thoughts are unsettling, but they are not as dangerous as the "worst" thought, which is the "evil so stealthy and grim."*

3. **Warning About "Evil":** *The poem warns that the most dreadful thought is one that involves an "evil so stealthy and grim" that its mere name should never be uttered. The consequences of summoning this evil are dire: once called, it hunts relentlessly and can't be escaped. The evil being described, the Scritchity Scratch, is depicted as a predatory creature that consumes its prey whole and is driven by an insatiable hunger. Its presence is a dire threat, and the act of summoning it leads to inevitable doom.*

4. **Creating Suspense and Fear:** *The poem builds suspense and fear through its vivid and unsettling imagery and language. As it progresses, the descriptions become increasingly dark and ominous:*

- **Imagery of the Evil Creature:** *The poem details the Scritchity Scratch with ghastly imagery, such as its "mouth is a flower / of fleshy red fingers" and its ability to "fly, swim, and walk / and yes, even slither." This diverse, monstrous capability heightens the sense of danger and inescapability.*

- **Eerie Sounds and Atmosphere:** *The poem creates an atmosphere of dread with descriptions of "low, breathy panting" and a presence that is undetectable until it is too late. This evokes a sense of paranoia and imminent threat.*

- **Closing Lines:** *The poem concludes with a direct address to the reader, creating a personal connection to the fear. The final lines reveal that the Scritchity Scratch has been summoned and is now coming for the reader, intensifying the suspense and horror by making it clear that the threat is real and imminent.*

5. **Title Contribution:** *The title "Scritchity Scratch" establishes a playful, almost whimsical tone at first glance. However, as the poem unfolds, it becomes clear that this seemingly innocuous title belies the terrifying nature of the creature described. The title sets up an expectation of something light-hearted or whimsical but delivers a chilling twist, contributing to the poem's climax by amplifying the horror of the*

creature's arrival. The final revelation that the Scritchity Scratch has come for the reader is a powerful climax that ties back to the title, creating a jarring contrast between expectation and reality.

Critical Thinking

1. Imagery and Descriptive Language: *The poem uses vivid imagery and descriptive language to create a sense of fear and suspense. Phrases such as "visions of sugar plums dance in your head" juxtaposed with "a thought to fill you with dread" contrast innocence with terror, enhancing the eerie tone. Descriptions like "an evil so stealthy and grim" and "a hideous sight, it's mouth is a flower, of fleshy red fingers" evoke grotesque and unsettling visuals that heighten the sense of horror. The imagery of "bones across a damp ground" and the creature's ability to "fly, swim, and walk and yes, even slither" intensify the fear by suggesting an omnipresent, shape-shifting menace. The language creates a creeping sense of dread, as if the creature is lurking just beyond the edge of perception, ready to pounce.*

2. Significance of the "Scritchity Scratch" and Power of Thoughts: *The "Scritchity Scratch" being conjured by merely reading or thinking about it emphasizes the power of thoughts and words in the poem. The concept suggests that thoughts are not just ephemeral; they have tangible consequences. The poem explores the idea that thinking about or uttering certain things can bring them into reality, particularly things we fear or wish to avoid. This theme is developed through the notion that the creature is summoned by the act of thinking or reading its name, highlighting how dangerous and powerful thoughts can be when they focus on fear. The "Scritchity Scratch" symbolizes the manifestation of our deepest anxieties and regrets, showing how our mental focus can summon and amplify these fears.*

3. Contrast Between Ordinary Fears and Supernatural Terror: *The poem contrasts everyday fears and regrets with the supernatural terror of the "Scritchity Scratch" to underscore the nature of fear. Ordinary fears, like regrets over past mistakes (e.g., picking on a sister or lying about a broken window), are depicted as bothersome but manageable. They are common, personal, and relatable. In contrast, the "Scritchity Scratch" represents an overwhelming, otherworldly fear that transcends ordinary experience. This contrast suggests that while everyday fears are part of human life and can be dealt with, supernatural fears are insidious and uncontrollable. The poem reveals that the nature of fear is not just about the specific objects or actions but also about the existential dread of the unknown and the uncontrollable. The monstrous entity reflects the ultimate terror of confronting something beyond comprehension and control, amplifying the sense that fear can be both a personal and a cosmic force.*

Harvester

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. What initially led Cora into the Grady Pines forest?
 - A) She was following a trail of candy.
 - B) She wanted to cut across to save time.
 - C) She was chasing after her missing cat.
 - D) She was following a mysterious voice.
2. How did Cora feel when she first saw her sister Charlotte in the bush?
 - A) She felt immediately relieved and excited.
 - B) She felt indifferent and uninterested.
 - C) She felt uneasy and noticed something was strange.
 - D) She felt angry and refused to talk.
3. What was the strange sound Cora heard that made her stomach sour?
 - A) A distant howl of a wolf.
 - B) The sound of rustling leaves.
 - C) Loud cracking sounds like knuckles.
 - D) The sound of heavy footsteps.
4. What horrifying discovery did Cora make about the creature in the forest?
 - A) It was a giant spider with human faces.
 - B) It was a huge, hunching creature with faces grafted onto it.
 - C) It was a ghostly figure with glowing eyes.
 - D) It was a magical being that could grant wishes.
5. What did the man find while fishing downstream from Grady Pines?
 - A) A pile of old newspapers.
 - B) A group of masks floating in the water.
 - C) A mysterious, glowing artifact.
 - D) A bundle of clothes and toys.

Dive Deeper

Answer each question by quoting a specific passage in the book. Included the page number.

1. Why did Cora decide to enter Grady Pines despite her mother's warning?

- Identify the reasons that led Cora to choose the path through the woods.
2. How does the author build suspense as Cora enters and explores Grady Pines?
 - Discuss the techniques used to create a sense of fear and anticipation in the story.
 3. What were the clues that made Cora suspicious of Charlotte and Abigail's appearances when she encountered them in the woods?
 - List the details that made Cora doubt that the girls were truly her sister and friend.

Critical Thinking

1. How does the description and history of Grady Pines enhance the sense of dread and mystery?
2. Analyze how the disappearance of Charlotte and the other children affects the dynamics between Cora and her mother, and how this tension drives Cora's decision-making throughout the narrative.

Harvester Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. *B) She wanted to cut across to save time.*
2. *C) She felt uneasy and noticed something was strange.*
3. *C) Loud cracking sounds like knuckles.*
4. *B) It was a huge, hunching creature with faces grafted onto it.*
5. *B) A group of masks floating in the water.*

Dive Deeper

1. *Cora's Decision to Enter Grady Pines**:* Cora decided to enter Grady Pines despite her mother's warning for several reasons:

- *Desperation for Freedom:* Cora longed for the freedom she once had before her sister's disappearance and the resulting overprotectiveness of her mother. This yearning for independence and normalcy drove her to make the risky decision.
- *Promise of Timeliness:* Cora was anxious about being late to meet her friend. The shortcut through Grady Pines promised to save her five minutes, making it a tempting option despite her mother's warning.
- *Perceived Safety:* Cora rationalized that a year had passed since the disappearances, convincing herself that it would be safe to cut through the pines. She believed that the danger was no longer present, or at least that there was no concrete evidence linking the disappearances to the woods.

2. *Building Suspense in Grady Pines:* The author builds suspense in Cora's exploration of Grady Pines through several techniques:

- *Atmospheric Descriptions:* The author describes the woods as craggier and more overgrown than Cora remembered, with an eerie silence replacing the usual sounds of summer. This creates a sense of foreboding and unfamiliarity.
- *Gradual Revelation:* As Cora encounters her sister and Abigail, the author carefully reveals disturbing details about their appearances and behavior. This includes the unnatural delay between their words and their lips, and the hollow quality of their voices, which contribute to the growing sense of unease.
- *Suspenseful Encounters:* The suspense intensifies when Cora realizes that something is amiss with Charlotte and Abigail. The unsettling clues, such as the mechanical behavior of Abigail and the presence of pointed bundles moving behind the bush, heighten the tension and anticipation.
- *Climactic Horror:* The ultimate reveal of the creature with faces of the missing children amplifies the horror, as Cora faces a monstrous entity that embodies the town's worst fears. The chase and confrontation with the creature heighten the suspense and terror, leading to a dramatic and frightening climax.

3. *Clues that Made Cora Suspicious:* Cora becomes suspicious of Charlotte and Abigail due to several clues:

- *Appearance and Behavior:* Charlotte and Abigail have an unnatural appearance. Charlotte's face is pale and dirty, with slicked-back hair, and her smile is broad and unnatural. Abigail's face is similarly waxlike with grimy teeth and missing red curls.

- *Voice and Echo: Both Charlotte and Abigail exhibit odd vocal qualities. Their voices have an echo or hollow quality, which feels dissonant compared to their physical appearance. This inconsistency makes Cora question their authenticity.*
 - *Lack of Personal Concern: Abigail does not ask about her grandmother, whom she loved deeply, and Charlotte does not inquire about their mother. This lack of personal concern seems abnormal and further arouses Cora's suspicion.*
 - *Mechanical Behavior: Abigail's behavior is almost mechanical, including her sudden silence and the peculiar sound of cracking knuckles. This unnatural behavior adds to the sense that something is wrong.*
 - *Missing Feet: Cora notices that Charlotte's feet are missing, which is a disturbing detail that suggests something is seriously wrong with her sister's appearance and identity.*
- These clues collectively make Cora doubt that Charlotte and Abigail are truly her sister and friend, leading her to the horrifying discovery of the creature.*

Horde Sweet Horde

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. What initially caused Henry to become wary of the empty lot next to his house?
 - A) The lot was overgrown with weeds.
 - B) He saw pests emerging from debris in the lot.
 - C) He noticed garbage accumulating in the lot.
 - D) He found out the lot was being considered for construction.
2. How does Henry's perception of the roach infestation evolve throughout the story?
 - A) He initially ignores the problem but eventually seeks professional help.
 - B) He is indifferent to the roaches until they become aggressive.
 - C) He immediately calls an exterminator upon seeing the first roach.
 - D) He becomes paranoid and exaggerates the presence of the roaches.
3. What does Henry do after discovering the roaches on his kitchen counter?
 - A) He immediately kills all the roaches.
 - B) He decides to call an exterminator the next day.
 - C) He cleans the kitchen thoroughly to prevent further infestations.
 - D) He moves out of the house in fear.
4. What happens to Henry after he jumps out of the window to escape the roaches?
 - A) He safely lands on the patio and immediately calls for help.
 - B) He gets tangled in the string lights and is unable to move.
 - C) He manages to escape but suffers from severe injuries.
 - D) He is rescued by a neighbor who heard his screams.
5. How does the story conclude with regard to Henry's fate?
 - A) Henry manages to escape the roaches and survives.
 - B) Henry is rescued just in time by an exterminator.
 - C) The roaches eventually leave Henry alone, sparing his life.
 - D) Henry is overwhelmed by the roaches and is consumed by them.

Dive Deeper

1. What initial thoughts does Henry have about the empty lot next to his house, and how does his perception change after his encounter with the cockroaches?
2. Describe Henry's nightmare and how it foreshadows the events that unfold later in the story.
3. How does Henry's physical and emotional state evolve from the moment he falls out of the window to when he realizes what is happening to him on the patio?

Critical Thinking

1. How did Henry's actions and attitude towards the roaches contribute to the severity of the situation?

Horde Sweet Horde Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. B) *He saw pests emerging from debris in the lot.*
2. B) *He is indifferent to the roaches until they become aggressive.*
3. B) *He decides to call an exterminator the next day.*
4. B) *He gets tangled in the string lights and is unable to move.*
5. D) *Henry is overwhelmed by the roaches and is consumed by them.*

Dive Deeper

1. Initial Thoughts and Perception Change:

Initially, Henry is pleased with the solitude provided by the empty lot next to his house, overlooking the weeds, litter, and debris. However, after encountering cockroaches on the lot and inside his house, he realizes the lot is a breeding ground for pests, which leads to his growing disgust and determination to get rid of them.

2. Henry's Nightmare:

In his nightmare, Henry is chased by a terrifying blob made up of thousands of small creatures, symbolizing the overwhelming presence of cockroaches. The nightmare foreshadows the real-life horror Henry faces when he is overrun by the swarm of roaches that eventually devour him.

3. Henry's Physical and Emotional Evolution:

After falling from the window, Henry is disoriented and physically weakened, tangled in string lights and unable to move. As he realizes the roaches are swarming over him, his emotional state shifts from confusion to horror and panic. The story ends with Henry in a state of agony and despair as the roaches begin to devour him alive.

Critical Thinking

1. How did Henry's actions and attitude towards the roaches contribute to the severity of the situation? *Henry's actions and attitude significantly contributed to the severity of the roach infestation. Despite noticing the roaches early on, Henry did not take immediate, effective action to address the problem. He dismissed the signs of infestation, like the roaches in the kitchen and the ones he encountered in the lot, believing he could simply call an exterminator later. This complacency allowed the roaches to multiply unchecked. Additionally, Henry's preference for solitude and avoidance of his neighbors meant that when the situation escalated, he had no one nearby to help him. His delay in dealing with the problem allowed the infestation to grow to a catastrophic level.*

Beneath the Ceiba

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. Why did the man change his usual route during his walk?
 - A) He was looking for something specific.
 - B) He was trying to avoid the sun.
 - C) He was drawn to the cool shade of a trail under tall trees.
 - D) He wanted to visit the graveyard.
2. What initially caused the man to feel uneasy as he approached the woman by the Ceiba tree?
 - A) The woman's voice.
 - B) Her unusual appearance and behavior.
 - C) The sudden drop in temperature.
 - D) The sounds of birds returning.
3. What did the woman do to the man after revealing her true form?
 - A) She asked him to help her with something.
 - B) She took his eyes and placed them in her own eye sockets.
 - C) She led him to the grave of someone named Marie.
 - D) She told him a story about her past.
4. What was the significance of the yellow rose found in the box?
 - A) It was a gift from the man to his lover.
 - B) It was a symbol of the first date between Felix and Marie.
 - C) It was used in a ritual by the woman.
 - D) It marked the grave of a loved one.
5. How did the man feel after discovering the connection between the picture in the house and the events in the graveyard?
 - A) Confused and uncertain.
 - B) Angry and vengeful.
 - C) Sad but understanding.
 - D) Relieved and peaceful.

Dive Deeper/ Critical Thinking

1. Describe how the setting of the graveyard and the Ceiba tree contributes to the atmosphere of the story. How does the environment influence the man's perception and actions?

2. What clues in the story suggest that the woman the man encounters is not just an ordinary old woman? How do these clues build suspense and contribute to the overall horror of the story?

3. Analyze the significance of the photograph and the rose in the context of the story. How do these elements help resolve the mystery of the woman's identity and the story's conclusion?

Beneath the Ceiba Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. C) *He was drawn to the cool shade of a trail under tall trees.*
2. B) *Her unusual appearance and behavior.*
3. B) *She took his eyes and placed them in her own eye sockets.*
4. B) *It was a symbol of the first date between Felix and Marie.*
5. C) *Sad but understanding.*

Dive Deeper/ Critical Thinking

1. Describe how the setting of the graveyard and the Ceiba tree contributes to the atmosphere of the story. How does the environment influence the man's perception and actions?

The setting of the graveyard and the Ceiba tree creates a dark, eerie atmosphere that heightens the tension in the story. The graveyard, with its tilted tombstones and oppressive heat, gives the impression of abandonment and decay. The Ceiba tree, often associated with death and supernatural beliefs, adds an element of dread and superstition. The man's decision to walk through this unsettling environment makes him more vulnerable to the strange and frightening occurrences he experiences. The environment influences his perception by amplifying his fear and confusion, making him question reality and intensifying the horror of encountering the corpse-like woman.

2. What clues in the story suggest that the woman the man encounters is not just an ordinary old woman? How do these clues build suspense and contribute to the overall horror of the story?

Several clues suggest that the woman is not an ordinary old woman. Her initial appearance with a dingy lace dress and tattered hat, her unnatural way of beckoning the man, and the unsettling feeling he has about her all hint at something amiss. As he approaches, her appearance becomes more distorted, and he notices that she is blurry and seems to be old but not in a normal way. The smell of rot and the eventual revelation of her blackened eye sockets and stitched mouth further confirm her supernatural nature. These clues build suspense by gradually revealing her true nature, escalating the horror as the man's initial confusion turns into terror when he realizes she is a walking corpse.

3. Analyze the significance of the photograph and the rose in the context of the story. How do these elements help resolve the mystery of the woman's identity and the story's conclusion?

The photograph and the rose play a crucial role in resolving the mystery of the woman's identity. The photograph reveals a young couple, one of whom is wearing a yellow rose—exactly like the one pinned to the woman's dress. The inscription on the back of the photo indicates that it is a keepsake from the first date of Felix and Marie, suggesting a deep, enduring love. This connection explains the woman's actions and motivations; she was trying to reunite with her long-lost love, Felix, after her death. The revelation provides closure to the man's harrowing experience and gives a poignant conclusion to the story, as he learns that the woman's intentions were driven by love rather than malevolence.

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. What did Caleb do with the pocket knife he found?
 - A) He gave it to his parents.
 - B) He cleaned it and used it to carve things.
 - C) He sold it at the market.
 - D) He threw it away.
2. How did Caleb react when the groundskeeper found him carving the picnic table?
 - A) He was scolded and sent home.
 - B) He was praised and allowed to continue.
 - C) He was told to leave the park immediately.
 - D) He was asked to help with cleaning.
3. What did Caleb notice on his back after his encounter with the Black Walnut tree?
 - A) A bright red rash.
 - B) A small hole that was dripping.
 - C) A bug bite.
 - D) A bruise from the tree.
4. What did Caleb do when he saw the hole on his back and smelled something rotten?
 - A) He showed his mother immediately.
 - B) He tried to hide it and applied a patch on his own.
 - C) He went to the hospital.
 - D) He ignored it and continued playing with his friends.
5. What happened to Caleb at the end of the story?
 - A) He went on his camping trip as planned.
 - B) He left the house and never returned.
 - C) He turned into a puddle of goo in his bed.
 - D) He was found by his parents and punished.

Dive Deeper/ Critical Thinking

1. Describe how Caleb's behavior changes from the beginning to the end of the story. How do his actions reflect his growing obsession with the pocket knife and the carving? Provide specific examples from the text to support your answer.
2. What is the significance of the Black Walnut tree in the story? How does Caleb's interaction with the tree contribute to the overall plot and theme? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

3. How does the author use Caleb's injury to build suspense and foreshadow the ending of the story? Describe the progression of Caleb's injury and how it affects his actions and state of mind.

Wetwood Answer Key:

Reading Comprehension

1. B) *He cleaned it and used it to carve things.*
2. B) *He was praised and allowed to continue.*
3. B) *A small hole that was dripping.*
4. B) *He tried to hide it and applied a patch on his own.*
5. C) *He turned into a puddle of goo in his bed.*

Dive Deeper/ Critical Thinking

1. Caleb's Changing Behavior:

Beginning: At the beginning of the story, Caleb finds a rusty pocket knife and is excited by it, even though he knows he shouldn't use it. He keeps it hidden from his parents and initially uses it for harmless pranks, like carving faces into fruits and making holes in bags of rice and beans at the store.

Middle: Caleb's behavior becomes more reckless as he carves his initials into a picnic table and later decides to carve into a large tree. His actions shift from playful mischief to more serious vandalism. He becomes increasingly obsessed with carving and his pocket knife.

End: By the end of the story, Caleb's obsession with carving leads him to an extreme act: he carves his initials into the bark of the Black Walnut tree, which eventually results in a painful and mysterious injury. His injury worsens, affecting his state of mind and actions, leading to a sense of paranoia and desperation.

Examples: Carving faces into fruits and making holes in rice and beans reflect his initial mischievous behavior. His decision to carve into the tree and the resulting injury show a deeper obsession and recklessness. The injury progresses from a small cut to a serious, oozy wound, mirroring Caleb's descent into obsession and self-destruction.

2. Significance of the Black Walnut Tree:

Role in Plot: The Black Walnut tree is central to the story's climax. Caleb's fascination with the tree and his decision to carve his initials into it mark a turning point. The tree represents both a physical and symbolic boundary that Caleb crosses, leading to his downfall.

Role in Theme: The tree symbolizes Caleb's attempt to leave a permanent mark or legacy, but it ultimately becomes the source of his demise. His interaction with the tree highlights themes of obsession and the consequences of crossing boundaries. The tree's ancient and majestic presence contrasts with Caleb's destructive actions, emphasizing the tragic outcome of his behavior.

Examples: Caleb admires the tree's grandeur and initially sees it as a perfect canvas for his carving. However, the tree's significance grows darker as Caleb's injury becomes linked to the tree's sap, leading to his eventual dissolution and death.

3. Building Suspense and Foreshadowing:

Injury Progression: Caleb's injury starts as a small cut but gradually becomes a serious problem. The wound on his back oozes a thick, foul-smelling substance and becomes increasingly severe. This progression of the injury builds suspense and foreshadows the story's ending.

Effects on Actions: Caleb's worsening injury affects his actions and state of mind. He becomes desperate to hide the injury and prevent his mother from discovering it. His actions become more frantic and secretive, leading him to attempt to fix the wound himself.

Foreshadowing: The injury's progression from a small cut to a serious, oozing wound parallels Caleb's increasing obsession and descent into a dark fate. The description of the wound and its effects on Caleb's behavior foreshadows the eventual dissolution of his body and the horrific conclusion of the story.

Examples: Caleb's initial attempts to hide the injury and his reaction to the strange sap on his back build tension. The oozing wound and its foul smell suggest something unnatural and sinister, leading to the final, tragic outcome where Caleb disappears.

Pumpkin Guts

Reading Comprehension

Choose the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. What was the main setting of the story?
 - a) A city hospital
 - b) A rural community
 - c) An amusement park
 - d) A school playground
2. How did the creature in the story first become a threat to the town?
 - a) It was accidentally released from a zoo
 - b) It emerged from a storm drain at the town square
 - c) It was a result of a chemical spill
 - d) It escaped from a laboratory
3. What was the creature made of?
 - a) Metal and glass
 - b) Rotten pumpkins and Christmas trees
 - c) Plastic and rubber
 - d) Sand and water
4. What did the townspeople use to try to distract the creature?
 - a) Fireworks
 - b) Music from a broken snow globe
 - c) A loud horn
 - d) Flashing lights
5. How did the creature ultimately get defeated?
 - a) It was captured by the military
 - b) It was poisoned by toxic waste
 - c) It was hit by a train
 - d) It was chased into a river

Dive Deeper/ Critical Thinking

1. Character Analysis: Why do you think Wade was the first victim of the creature? What does this suggest about the creature's behavior?
2. Plot Development: How did the townspeople's initial reactions to the creature's attack contribute to their overall sense of fear and panic?
3. Setting and Symbolism: How does the setting of Pond #12 contribute to the story's atmosphere and the development of the creature?

4. Cause and Effect: What was the impact of the creature's attack on the town, and how did the actions of the Sheriff and his team help in stopping the creature?
5. Theme Exploration: What might the story suggest about the nature of fear and how it can affect a community over time?
6. Inference: Why do you think the creature was ultimately defeated by the train? What does this reveal about the creature's limitations?
7. Literary Devices: How does the story use irony to enhance the narrative, particularly in the description of the creature's final moments?

Pumpkin Guts Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. *b) A rural community*
2. *b) It emerged from a storm drain at the town square*
3. *b) Rotten pumpkins and Christmas trees*
4. *b) Music from a broken snow globe*
5. *c) It was hit by a train*

Dive Deeper/ Critical Thinking

1. *Character Analysis: Wade was the first victim because he lived near Pond #12, where the creature was born. The creature likely targeted him due to proximity and its need for sustenance, as it was driven by hunger. This suggests that the creature's behavior was influenced by its environment and its primal instincts.*
2. *Plot Development: The townspeople's initial reactions, which included confusion and disbelief, heightened their fear and panic. The sudden shift from a festive celebration to chaos made the event more traumatic, contributing to their long-term anxiety and the community's sense of vulnerability.*
3. *Setting and Symbolism: Pond #12, as a place where discarded holiday items decayed, symbolizes the town's neglected and forgotten fears. The setting of the pond reflects the creature's origins and the grotesque nature of what became of the town's refuse, enhancing the story's eerie atmosphere.*
4. *Cause and Effect: The creature's attack resulted in widespread panic, destruction, and loss of life. The Sheriff and his team's actions, particularly their plan to lure the creature with the gas station and use the train to destroy it, were crucial in stopping the creature and saving the remaining townspeople.*
5. *Theme Exploration: The story suggests that fear can become a pervasive force that affects how a community behaves and remembers events. Over time, the initial horror transforms into legend, illustrating how fear can shape and distort collective memory.*
6. *Inference: The creature was defeated by the train because it did not anticipate the physical force of the train and was unable to react to it in time. This reveals that the creature's limitations included a lack of understanding of mechanized threats and possibly its own physical constraints.*
7. *Literary Devices: The story uses irony in the creature's final moments as the seemingly incongruous force of a train defeats it. The creature, which had terrorized the town, is ultimately vanquished by an everyday occurrence, highlighting the contrast between the mundane and the monstrous.*

