

# EXPLORATIONS IN LITERATURE

AMERICA READS / Seventh Edition







**America Reads** Seventh Edition

# *Explorations in Literature*

**Ruth S. Cohen**

**Nancy C. Millett**

**Raymond J. Rodrigues**

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**Ruth S. Cohen** Free-lance writer and editor of books for young people. Editor-Compiler of *Craft of Detection*, *The Life Force*, *Present Imperfect*, *Edges of Reality*, and *The Fractured Image*.

**Nancy C. Millett** Professor of Secondary Education, Wichita State University. Coauthor of *How to Read a Poem* and *How to Read a Short Story*. Coauthor of literature, grammar, and composition textbooks for secondary and elementary schools. Formerly teacher of English at the University of Rochester and Wichita High School East. Consultant on writing.

**Raymond J. Rodrigues** Professor of Education and Director of Teacher Education at New Mexico State University. Executive Board member of NCTE Conference on English Education. Formerly high-school teacher of English in Nevada and New Mexico. Past President of the Southern Nevada Teachers of English and the Utah Council of Teachers of English.

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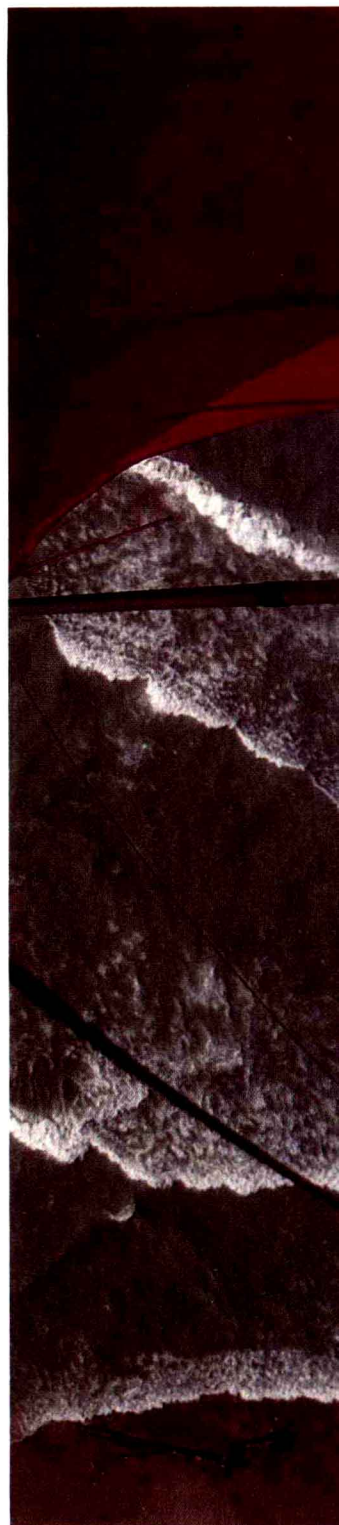
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No matter whether you want to be the first to climb a mountain, or just to escape in some way from poverty; to catch a murderer and win a reward, or simply to defend yourself against thieves; to be the best in the world, or merely to feel you belong; sometime, somehow, you have to take chances.

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## *Take a Chance*

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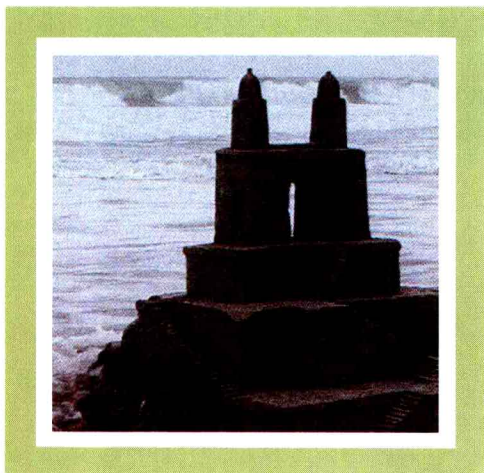
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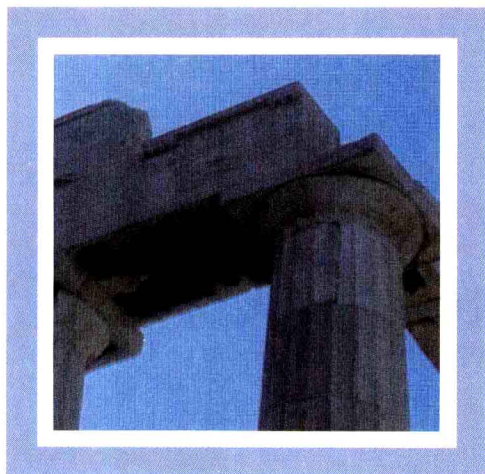
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# *My Teacher, the Hawk*

Jean McCord

To say he never forgave me is one thing. To say I've never forgiven myself is another.

I live on a small place about five miles out of town with my grandparents. It isn't really a farm; we've only got six acres, but we keep chickens and plant a garden, and there's lots of room to grow up in.

My grandparents are good people. Five Christmases ago, when I was ten years old, my grandfather, whom I've always called Popsie, asked me what I wanted that year.

"I'd sure like a gun," I answered, looking slant-eyed at my grandmother who hated guns and hunting of any sort.

"Larry, you're too young for a gun," my grandmother spoke up. "You could shoot yourself. Or someone else. What would you do with one, anyway?" Her mouth was pursed with disapproval, but she kept her eyes down on her sewing.

"Tin cans," I muttered. "Target practice. Lots of kids my age have guns. Jim Johnson's got a real deer rifle." This was almost a downright lie. All he had was a .22, and I knew it.

On Christmas morning there was a long, skinny package for me beneath the tree. I sucked in my breath. Had my grandmother relented, or was she pacifying me with a toy bow and arrow set? I ripped open the box. Inside was a beautiful Remington .22 rifle and four boxes of shells.

Popsie's face was a smiling circle. "I talked her into it," he nodded his head toward grandmother, "on condition that you use it properly, of course."

"Oh, Gram," I gave her a bear hug

around her short little neck. "You know I'm pretty responsible."

"Huh!" she said, grunting through my hug.

That afternoon Popsie and I went out into the cold, brown fields. Popsie had once been a pretty good hunter himself, but now a bad leg kept him from it. And, I imagined, my grandmother.

"You know, don't you," Popsie was saying, "that you never point a gun at anything or anyone unless you intend to kill them. These stories you hear about accidental shootings are all poppycock as far as I'm concerned. Everyone knows a gun is for one thing only and that is . . . to kill. I don't mean you should ever intend to kill anyone. I'm only saying that if you ever point a gun at a person, even in fun, that's more'n likely what's going to happen."

We'd brought along some empty tin cans and Popsie set them up on a fence post. He showed me how to load the gun, how to carry it safely, and even made me practice going through a fence with it. I had to unload every time, set the gun through the wires, then crawl through myself.

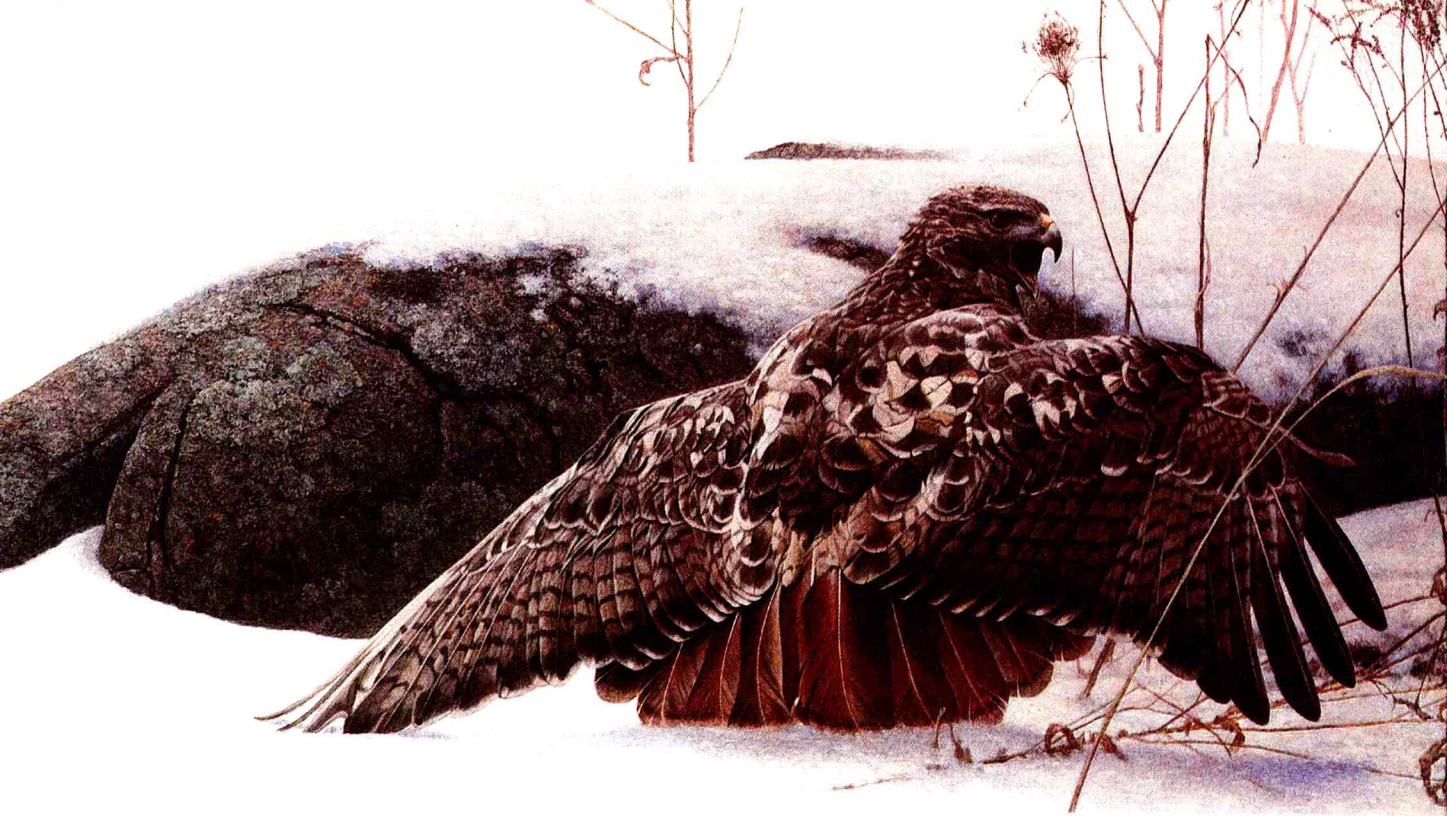
When we were potting at the tin cans, Popsie scored a hit every time, but I never even saw where my shots were going.

"It's a matter of relaxing," he kept telling me. "Everything in the world is best

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Jean McCord, "My Teacher, the Hawk," in *Deep Where the Octopi Lie*. Copyright © 1962, 1964, 1965, 1971 by Jean McCord. Reprinted with the permission of Atheneum Publishers.





done relaxed. Believe me. Even work. Most of all, work.”

We shot up all the shells. By the end of the day I knew what Popsie meant. Line up the sights, relax, squeeze the trigger slowly, and no flinching when the gun went off.

I was content with just target practice for a long time, but when I got so I could hit the cans ten times out of ten shots, I began to look around for something a little more exciting. My first chance came when Grandma came raging in from her garden.

“Those blasted jack rabbits,” she slammed down a puny handful of carrots the size of my fingers. “They went right down the rows. Ate half the lettuce, all the carrottops, and most of the beetops, too.”

It was Spring now and Grandma worked her garden in the early morning and again in the evenings until the light failed and she looked like a little hunched-over scarecrow out there in the twilight.

I didn’t say anything to her, but that

evening after she had straightened up and put away her tools, with Popsie’s consent I sneaked down to the garden and cleverly concealed myself in a clump of bushes. When the rabbits came, I could see them clearly in the wash of moonlight that lay over the land, and I picked them off one by one. Rabbits are pretty dumb. They kept coming back, and I kept getting them that night and several nights afterward. In a couple of days Grandma’s garden was growing in peace. She didn’t say a word to me about it. I guess she knew it was either that or lose her entire garden.

One night we were sitting around, Popsie reading his paper, and I was studying. Suddenly we heard a terrible commotion in the hen house. There is nothing in the world noisier than a bunch of frightened chickens, and they had really cut loose this time. Popsie and I jumped up, and I raced to my bedroom for my gun. We got to the hen house just in time to see a big raccoon coming out