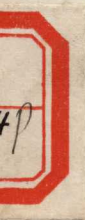


英语阅读丛书

READING LABORATORY

111b

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Brave Ballerina

HER DETERMINATION
TURNED TRAGEDY INTO SUCCESS

by Margaret F. Atkinson and May Hillman

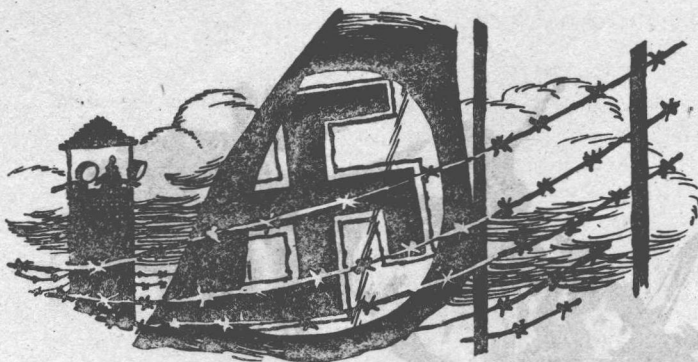
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¹ On the fateful night in 1939 when the first German bombs fell on Poland, young Nina Novak, one of Poland's most promising dancers, was performing in the Opera House in Warsaw. Two days later the Opera House was destroyed by bombs. Nina's whole life had been devoted to ballet; now her world collapsed around her. In the dark years that followed, it seemed that she would never dance again, much less become one of the world's leading ballerinas. But Nina had courage—and a dream that began when she was very young.

² Nina was born in Warsaw and spent the early years of her childhood there. Her first schoolteacher noticed little Nina's grace and told her she should study dancing. Nina delightedly reported the teacher's words at home, but her mother fought the idea, saying that no daughter of hers was going to be a dancer. Nina, however, was a determined child. She had made up her mind to be a really great ballerina no matter what the cost, and she worked toward this goal with her whole being. She coaxed and raged until her mother finally gave in and let her enroll at the Polish Opera Ballet School.

³ Her first appearance on stage came three years later, when she was allowed to dance the part of a slave girl in the opera *Aïda*. Shortly after this, Nina became a real professional, dancing for two years as prima ballerina of the Children's Ballet of Warsaw.

⁴ When she was thirteen, she was taken into the Polish Opera Company. She was the youngest dancer ever to become a member of its *corps de ballet*. The following year, she started out with the company on a long European tour. She spent



two exciting years dancing in the capitals of Europe, and she rose from her humble place in the *corps de ballet* all the way to soloist.

She had just returned to Warsaw after this tour when the Polish State Ballet was invited to dance at the World's Fair in New York early in 1939. But while she was dancing gaily in New York, war clouds were darkening over her native country. Nina had been home for only a month when Hitler marched into Poland.

The invading Germans decreed that anyone who did not have a job would be sent to a work camp. At great risk, Nina refused to dance at the large theater that the Germans had taken over. Instead, she joined a group of Polish dancers in a small, ill-equipped theater where they gave performances only for their own countrymen.

The dark years of World War II wore on. One by one, the members of Nina's large and wealthy family were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Her adored older brother was taken first, then her father, then Nina and her other brothers and sisters. They were separated and sent to different camps. Nina frantically asked for news of her family from each new prisoner who came to her camp. Dreary months dragged by before the tragic news reached her that her beloved brother had been killed for anti-Nazi activities. Her father, too, was dead—of starvation.

Dazed with grief, she no longer cared whether she lived or died. Six months later, when liberating troops arrived and threw open the prison gates, she was so thin that she could hardly walk.

Barely aware that the war was over, Nina listlessly began to pick up the threads of her life. She was reunited with what was left of her family, and they tried to make some sort of life for themselves in war-torn Poland. She began to feel vague stirrings of the old, familiar desire to dance, but she was still too depressed and weak to practice. Her younger brother tried to encourage her. He began to practice with her, and soon they had built up a charming little dance routine of their own. Together they found dancing engagements in many Warsaw night spots. The family decided that the best future for Nina as a dancer was in the United States, and they started saving money for her to make the trip.

Nina arrived in New York in 1947—a slight girl whose tragic dark eyes held the only hint of the heartbreak she had been through. She set about learning to speak English and took intensive ballet lessons to retrain her still-frail body. She applied for a position in the *corps de ballet* of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1948, and was accepted. She worked hard, determined to rise to the top. Four years later, she had made the grade—she was the top-ranking ballerina with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

The bitter war had brought Nina heartbreak and had driven her to the verge of physical collapse. But in spite of this, she says today, "Always in life, I have luck—I really have luck!" She insists that it was luck that brought her two of her greatest roles. The first was *Swanhilda* in *Coppelia*. Nina danced that role on three days' notice when the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was in Chicago. Replacing Danilova, who was ill, she

danced so well that she got rave notices from the Chicago critics.

¹² It was luck again, according to Nina, that brought her the role in *Mute Wife* for which she is best known. The leading ballerina had an argument with the choreographer and walked out. Nina stepped in.

¹³ She has won a leading role in almost every ballet of the Ballet Russe. Still driven by ambition, she is so dedicated to her profession that nothing else matters to her. Nina Novak has taken for her creed the words of her teacher of long ago: "If people tell you that you cannot dance, do not believe them, for you can. But if they say that you are wonderful, do not believe them either, for you must always improve."

HOW WELL DID YOU READ?

How exact was your reading?

1. In the Children's Ballet of Warsaw, Nina was
- A the star, or prima ballerina
 - B the youngest dancer
 - C still a beginner

What happened when?

2. Of the following events, the first to occur was
- A the German invasion of Poland
 - B Nina's European tour
 - C the World's Fair in New York
3. Nina spent the last part of the war
- A dancing in Warsaw night spots
 - B working with a small Polish troupe
 - C in prison
4. Nina began her work in ballet again
- A while she was still in prison
 - B as soon as the war was over
 - C when she arrived in New York

Do you know the reason why?

5. Nina refused to dance at the theater taken over by the Germans because she
- A wanted to dance in a larger theater
 - B was no longer interested in dancing
 - C did not want to dance for the Germans

Can you see the similarity?

6. With both the Polish Opera Company and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Nina
- A began in the *corps de ballet*
 - B was a top-ranking ballerina
 - C both A and B

Can you draw the right conclusions?

7. It is most accurate to say that the war
- A did not affect Nina's devotion to dancing
 - B almost ruined Nina's whole life
 - C changed Nina's most important goals
8. Nina's statement that it was luck that brought her two of her greatest roles is
- A completely untrue
 - B partially true
 - C the whole truth
9. Nina thinks that she
- A still must prove to others that she can dance
 - B still must work at learning to dance
 - C has at last reached her goal

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

A. Often you can tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it. This is called getting the meaning from context.

Directions: Find the word in the paragraph that means

- 1. important; disastrous (1)
- 2. ordered (6)
- 3. very sad (7)

4. indifferently; dejectedly (9)
5. indefinite; not clear (9)
6. thorough; strenuous (10)
7. edge; brink (11)
8. statement of belief (13)

B. A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used.

Directions: Read the three meanings for each word. Look back to the paragraph to see how the word is used in the story. Write the letter that stands before the correct meaning.

9. followed (1)
 A obeyed
 B came after in time
 C listened closely
10. familiar (9)
 A well-known
 B friendly; close
 C too bold; presumptuous
11. position (10)
 A location
 B opinion
 C job
12. notice (11)
 A warning; announcement
 B printed sign
 C courteous attention
13. leading (12)
 A guiding; directing
 B principal; chief
 C beginning; opening

- C.** *re* (again)
un (not)
im (not)

A knowledge of these prefixes will provide you with a key to the meaning of many unfamiliar words. Some words that have these prefixes are

reread = read again
unjust = not just
imperfect = not perfect

Directions: The words in column II have the prefix *re-*, *un-*, or *im-*. Write the word that matches each definition in column I and underline the prefix.

I	II
14. plain	ungrateful
15. not clean	unfathomed
16. not measured; very deep	undecorated
17. come back	impolite
18. not thankful	impure
19. bounce back	return
20. not polite	rebound

D. Sometimes *re-*, *un-*, and *im-* are **not** prefixes—they do not join with a base word to change its meaning. In the words *rest*, *unit*, and *imp*, *re-*, *un-*, and *im-* are not prefixes.

Directions: All the words listed begin with *re-*, *un-*, or *im-*. If the beginning is a prefix, write **P**. If it is not a prefix, write **N**.

21. unity
22. restful
23. uneasy
24. impersonal
25. regain
26. imitate

E. Many words are built on **base words** that you know well.

check — unchecked, checker, checking

Directions: All but one of the words in each line are built on the same base word. Find the wrong word and write it.

27. wild, wilderness, willingness, wildwood
28. hard, chard, hardness, harder
29. quality, equal, sequel, qualify
30. admire, admiration, admiring, admit
31. excuse, custodian, excusable, excused
32. sender, sending, sentry, sent
33. timid, time, timed, timing



SKELETONS FROM THE SEA CREATE

The Treasure of Sanibel Island

by Murray T. Pringle

- ¹ On the beach of a little island in Florida, a college professor was collecting seashells from among thousands that lay strewn over the sands. They were of all sorts, shapes, sizes, and descriptions. Gathering an armful of the choicest specimens, he carried them to higher ground, well beyond the greedy clutch of the ocean. He left them there for about thirty minutes. When he returned, he stared in astonishment; every shell had vanished!
- ² The only footprints in the sand were his own, so that no thief was responsible. Nor could ocean waves possibly have reached the spot, because the sand was bleached white and bone dry. What, then, had become of the shells? The solution was extremely simple: they had been "repossessed." What the professor had believed to be empty, lifeless shells were actually occupied by hermit crabs. While he was gone the crabs had simply taken their shells home to the shoreline. Mystery solved.
- ³ Such experiences are not unusual for the amateur conchologists (shell collectors) who seek the treasure of Sanibel Island. Sanibel, a strip of land twelve miles long and two miles across at its widest point, is four miles off Florida's Gulf Coast. Although it is visited by many who are interested in shell collecting, it is inhabited by only a few dozen people. Most of these earn their living by collecting and selling the strange treasures that the tide tosses on their shores.

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⁴ For hundreds of years, the ocean has cast up tons of such wealth on the little island. With the exception of Australia's Great Barrier Reef and a few remote spots in the South Pacific, there is no other place in the world that offers collectors such a variety. Sanibel shells include nearly four hundred different species.

⁵ Following almost every storm, gay and unusual shells are washed onto the beaches. They form four or five long heaps, each as much as three feet deep. Even on calm nights, the ceaseless ocean tides deliver fresh supplies.

⁶ Why, of all islands in the Western Hemisphere, should Sanibel be so rich in this strange treasure? The answer lies in its position. Sanibel is the last in a string of coastal islands extending south from Charlotte Harbor. The rest of the islands run from north to south, but Sanibel runs from east to west, forming a natural barrier that blocks shelled creatures working their way northward from the tropics.

⁷ Shell collecting may never become as popular as stamp or coin collecting, but it is enjoyed by thousands of people all over the world. There are about 150,000 different types of shells. They can be divided into two main classes: univalves and bivalves. Univalves are best typified by conches and snails. Bivalves have twin shells connected by a hinge; there are more than 16,000 varieties, including the familiar oyster, clam, scallop, and mussel.

⁸ Seashells range in value from a few cents to

hundreds, even thousands, of dollars. Some of the deepwater shells around Sanibel are worth \$400 apiece. Not long ago a wealthy collector paid \$10,000 for a rather mediocre collection in order to obtain a rare univalve volute.

⁹ If a shell collector wanted to be cute in describing his hobby, he could say, "I collect skeletons!" For that is what shells really are—the skeletons of creatures that wear their bony framework on the outside rather than on the inside as most other animals do.

¹⁰ Every year a shell show is held on the island. It draws collectors and shell experts who come from all over the world to study and marvel at the thousands of specimens and the novelties that have been made from the more common shells. The main exhibits, however, are not for sale. These include the rare and beautiful *gloria maris* (glory of the sea), which is found in Philippine waters. This shell is valued at \$1000, but so few are known to exist that no collector who owns one will sell for any price.

¹¹ Since the advent of deep-sea diving and skin diving, several shells that were once extremely rare have dropped in value. An example is the junonia, which is among the shells found on Sanibel. It is a striking specimen, a creamy white shell of slim spindle shape, marked with spiral rows of brown or orange spots. Once, around the middle of the nineteenth century, a junonia shell sold at a London shell auction for \$2500. Only a few years ago a junonia was still fetching a price of \$200. Recently, however, more and more have been found. Today good specimens are worth \$30, and ordinary ones sell for as little as \$3.

¹² The rarer, more valuable shells found on Sanibel are sold to hobbyists, museums, and dealers. The more common types are shipped by the barrel to manufacturers who turn the shells into ashtrays, lamps, and other articles.

¹³ Shells have been used as money by many peoples. The American Indian, for instance, used shell money, which he called wampum. Indians also used certain shells as razors or as decorations for their costumes.

¹⁴ Shells were also used in early industries. The Phoenicians of ancient Tyre discovered that a purple dye could be made by crushing certain shells; this dye was used to color clothing.

15 Conchology is an inexpensive hobby that you can enjoy even if you don't live near the seashore. Snail shells can be found in wooded areas, especially under fallen leaves, decaying logs, or stones. You may also find fossilized shells embedded in rocks and dried-up stream beds. Clean the shells immediately. Washing may be enough for some; others may have to be soaked in alcohol. Dry your specimens in the shade to prevent the sunshine from fading them. As a final treatment, polish the shells with oil or petroleum jelly. Expanding your collection will be an endless source of fun and satisfaction. And perhaps someday you may add to it some of the treasures of Sanibel Island.

HOW WELL DID YOU READ?

What was the writer's purpose?

1. The writer told the story of the professor and the vanishing shells to
 - A give the reader an idea of what shell collecting is like
 - B provide an interesting opening
 - C set a tone of mystery for the article

How carefully did you read?

2. The key to the mystery was the fact that the shells were
 - A valuable
 - B wet
 - C occupied
3. The most unusual thing about the Sanibel shells is their
 - A variety
 - B colorfulness
 - C usefulness
4. Sanibel receives a fresh supply of shells
 - A once a year
 - B every night
 - C only after storms

Did you understand why?

5. The shells come to Sanibel because it is
 - A the last in a chain of islands
 - B a barrier in the path of shell creatures
 - C both A and B
6. The clam is classified as a bivalve because it has
 - A a skeleton
 - B no hinge
 - C two shells
7. The junonia shell declined in value because
 - A the supply increased
 - B the quality decreased
 - C both A and B

Can you see the similarities?

8. American Indians and ancient Phoenicians were alike in that both
 - A collected shells as a hobby
 - B used shells for decorative purposes
 - C had shell money
9. Stamp and shell collecting are alike in that
 - A rare specimens always increase in value
 - B one can spend much or little on them
 - C new varieties are created every year

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

A. Often you can tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it. This is called getting the meaning from context.

Directions: Find the word in the paragraph that means

1. scattered (1)
2. finest (1)
3. distant (4)
4. hot regions (6)
5. shown by example (7)
6. of middle quality (8)
7. wonder (10)
8. coming (11)

B. A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used.

Directions: Read the three meanings for each word. Look back to the paragraph to see how the word is used in the story. Write the letter that stands before the correct meaning.

9. clutch (1)
 - A control
 - B grip; grasp
 - C crucial situation; emergency
10. occupied (2)
 - A lived in
 - B seized
 - C employed
11. exception (4)
 - A exclusion
 - B objection
 - C unusual thing
12. draws (10)
 - A attracts
 - B extracts
 - C contracts
13. common (10)
 - A public
 - B ordinary
 - C unrefined; vulgar

C. test / ed mind / ed fin / ished washed

When *-ed* is added to a word that ends in a *t* or *d* sound, the *-ed* is a separate syllable. When *-ed* is added to a word that does not end in a *t* or *d* sound, *-ed* is not a separate syllable.

Directions: Write each word. Draw a line between the syllables.

14. bolted
15. waited
16. waded
17. parted
18. gushed
19. posted
20. halted

D. Synonyms are words that have the same or similar meanings. The words *happiness* and *joy* are synonyms because they mean the same thing or nearly the same thing.

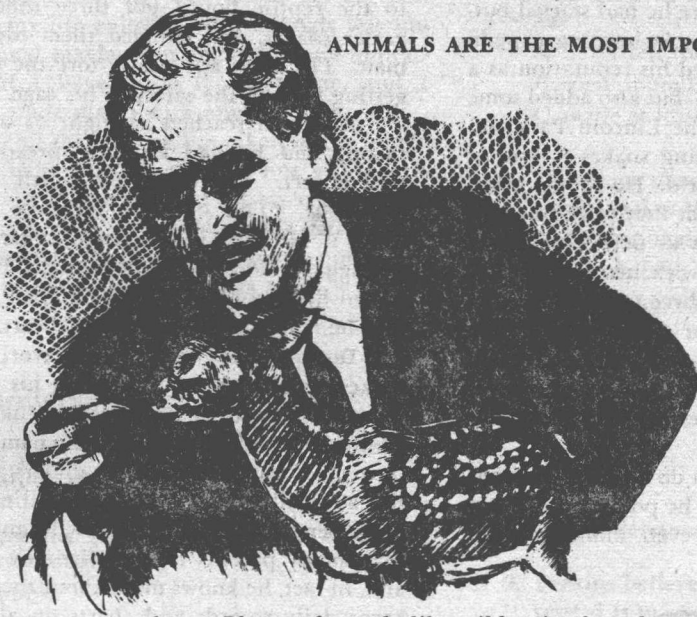
Directions: There are three words in each line. Two of the words are synonyms. Write the word that is not a synonym.

21. collecting, gathering, driving
22. sorts, colors, kinds
23. dry, damp, moist
24. answer, solution, simple
25. roundest, widest, broadest
26. rarely, seldom, never

E. Homonyms are words that sound alike but have different meanings and, usually, different spellings.

Directions: Read each sentence and the homonyms in parentheses. Write the homonym that is correct in the sentence.

27. The river washed a (bolder, boulder) downstream.
28. On the envelope there was a bit of (sealing, ceiling) wax.
29. The fire started in the disposal (chute, shoot).
30. Could he (cite, sight, site) any good reasons?
31. A (corps, core) is a specialized branch of the armed services.
32. The air was filled with the (cent, scent, sent) of lilacs.
33. Old Henry fastened the rowboat to the (pier, peer).



ANIMALS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT INHABITANTS OF

MARLIN PERKINS' WORLD

by Norma Lee Browning

- ¹ Plenty of people like wild animals so long as they're behind bars. But it takes a special kind of person to get them there.
- ² Any man who would take four days out from his honeymoon to go snake hunting would probably qualify as a rare specimen. As Marlin Perkins admits, "I decided early in life—if you'll pardon the wisecrack—that I belonged in a zoo."
- ³ His family's neighbors back in Carthage, Missouri, thought so too. They complained and called him "that awful Perkins boy" because he was always bringing home goats, rabbits, squirrels, possums, and garter snakes. He was almost thrown out of Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, Missouri, for keeping snakes in his closet. At the University of Missouri he had similar troubles. One of his snakes got loose in the boardinghouse where he lived. His landlady never forgave him. Once, talking to his girl friend, he casually produced a king snake from his pocket. That ended the romance.
- ⁴ After two years of college, Perkins told his father he wanted to quit and work in a zoo. His father was a circuit judge, a sedate and patient man who hoped that someday his son would go into law. But he gave his blessing for Marlin to follow the path of his own choice.
- ⁵ Young Perkins got a job at the St. Louis Zoo sweeping the sidewalks for \$3.50 a day. He was happy, for now he could at least watch the peacocks and flamingos and elephants while he was working. On lunch hours he went around studying and taking notes on all the animals.
- ⁶ He was soon made curator of reptiles and built up one of the country's finest reptile collections. He left St. Louis in 1938 to take over as director of

From "The Wonderful World of Marlin Perkins" by Norma Lee Browning by permission of the Chicago Tribune.
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the Buffalo Zoo and went to Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo in 1944. In 1962 he accepted a position with the St. Louis Zoo, where he had started out.

⁷ His far-flung, annual snake-hunting expeditions have not only increased his reputation as a herpetologist (snake expert) but also added some outstanding specimens to the Lincoln Park collection. For Perkins, catching snakes is one of the easiest things in the world. He simply grabs them behind the head so that they can't bite and stuffs them in a sack. He's as deft with a boa constrictor as a seamstress with her needle, and though he has been bitten three times by poisonous snakes, his affection for them has not lessened. He thinks of snakes—as of all wildlife—in terms of personalities, and has a special fondness for them because he believes they are misunderstood.

⁸ “Look at what they can do *without* legs that animals *with* legs can't do,” he points out. “They can slither up cliffs that even monkeys can't climb.”



⁹ Snakes do not yet have the universal appeal that Perkins wishes they had. Even other animals don't like them. “One of the toughest animals I've ever dealt with never got used to snakes,” he says. This was Bushman, the 550-pound gorilla that was proclaimed “the most outstanding and most valuable single animal of its kind in any zoo in the world.”

¹⁰ Bushman once escaped from his cage. Nothing could lure him back. Finally a keeper went to the reptile house, got three innocent little garter snakes, and dangled them toward Bushman. The great ape nearly tore the place apart getting back to the safety of his cage.

¹¹ Bushman reached a height of six feet two inches, and he had an arm spread of nearly twelve feet. His estimated worth was about \$100,000. (The original purchase price was \$3600.) He died in his sleep, apparently from old age, in 1951. No other animal has ever attained his box office appeal or filled the special spot he held in Marlin Perkins' heart.

¹² Does Perkins have any favorites—besides snakes—among the specimens in his zoo family today? It's hard to say which he likes best, he admits. He remembers all their names, talks to them in a way they seem to understand, and is like a fretful mother when one is ailing. He takes more personal interest in his wild animal brood than many parents take in their own children, and, in fact, he knows more about them, too. He keeps daily records and charts on all the baby animals. He knows their teething habits, takes their temperatures every day, and watches their diet strictly.

¹³ He will not feed the animals food that isn't fit for human consumption—mice and worm diets excepted, of course. “Animals have sensitive stomachs,” he explains, “just like people. Their digestive systems are similar to ours.” If there were a yardstick for measuring man's love for wild animals, Perkins would probably win all the prizes. He feels that if one understands them, animals are the most fascinating things in the world.

¹⁴ At home and among his friends, Perkins is known as the perfect gentleman-host. He is equally at ease hearing a symphony, attending an art exhibit, or hunting giraffes in Africa.

¹⁵ Marlin Perkins' philosophy of life is as interesting as the life he leads. He sums it up this way:

¹⁶ “My life has taught me that the surest path to success is to find out what you most *enjoy* doing, then set about to do it. If a man is going to spend most of his waking hours earning a living, he ought to spend them doing what he likes best.”

¹⁷ "I am truly sorry for people who have always dreamed about doing something else but surrendered before they ever tried. My decision to spend my life enjoying wild animals was unconventional, maybe even outlandish and impractical. But I have made it come true, and I wouldn't trade places with anybody."

¹⁸ With all the risks he has taken in his jungle world of wild animals, there is one risk he refuses to take in the civilized society of man. He never drives without fastening his safety belt. His explanation: "I don't want to get snuffed out yet. I have so many more things to do."

HOW WELL DID YOU READ?

How carefully did you read?

1. During his school days, Marlin's love of snakes brought him
 - A trouble
 - B popularity
 - C money
2. Perkins' first zoo job was
 - A collecting snakes
 - B sweeping sidewalks
 - C taking notes on animals
3. The attitude of Perkins' father when his son quit college was one of
 - A anger
 - B relief
 - C resignation

What did the writer say?

4. Perkins catches snakes by using
 - A his hands
 - B a net
 - C neither A nor B
5. The animal that Perkins loved most was
 - A a snake
 - B a gorilla
 - C an elephant

Can you draw the right conclusions?

6. There is evidence in the article that Perkins has
 - A never left the American continent
 - B spent more time abroad than at home
 - C made at least one trip overseas
7. The story about Bushman's reaction to the garter snakes shows that
 - A even animals dislike snakes
 - B people often misunderstand snakes
 - C Bushman was a tough animal to manage
8. Marlin Perkins entered his lifework through
 - A chance
 - B choice
 - C necessity

Did you understand what you read?

9. Perkins believes that the best way to be successful is to
 - A work hard at it
 - B do what you enjoy most
 - C be unconventional

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

A. Often you can tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it. This is called getting the meaning from context.

Directions: Find the word in the paragraph that means

1. calm; dignified (4)
2. job (6)
3. skillful (7)
4. occurring everywhere (9)
5. attract; tempt (10)
6. value (11)
7. irritable; discontented (12)
8. fantastic (17)

B. A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used.

Directions: Read the three meanings for each word. Look back to the paragraph to see how the word is used in the story. Write the letter that stands before the correct meaning.

9. rare (2)

- A uncommon
- B excellent
- C underdone

10. finest (6)

- A best in quality
- B most subtle
- C purest

11. outstanding (7)

- A unpaid
- B resisting
- C prominent

12. simply (7)

- A merely
- B easily
- C foolishly

13. truly (17)

- A rightfully
- B faithfully
- C genuinely

C. Adding *er* or *ing* to a word does not change the way you divide the word into syllables. The *er* or *ing* is usually a separate syllable.

ham / mer ham / mer / er ham / mer / ing

Directions: Write each word and draw a line between the syllables.

- 14. farmer
- 15. storming
- 16. buyer
- 17. returning
- 18. welder
- 19. polisher
- 20. staggering

D. The prefixes *in-* and *im-* may mean either "not" or "in."

insincere = not sincere

inhabit = live in

imperfect = not perfect

import = bring in

Directions: Decide whether the prefix in each word means "not" or "in." Write *not* or *in*.

- 21. immodest
- 22. inaccurate
- 23. inside
- 24. indirect
- 25. implant
- 26. invade

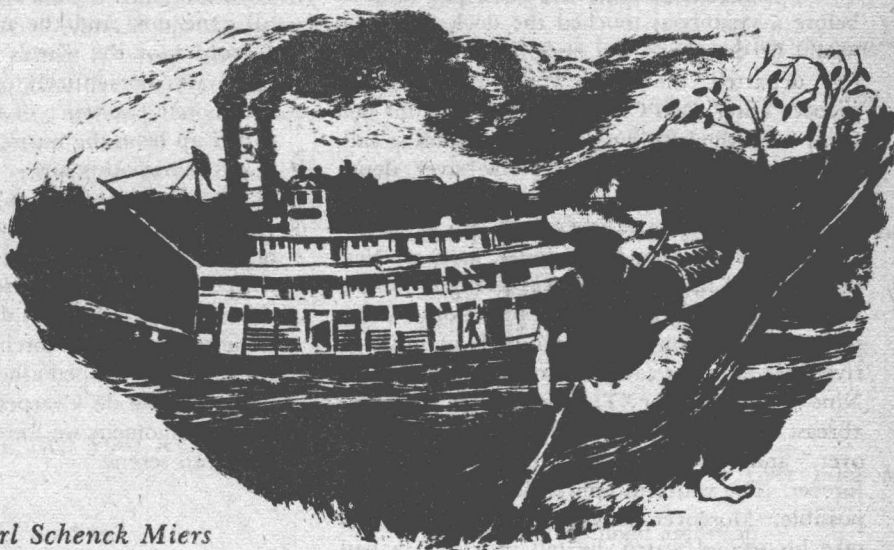
E. violin + *ist* = violinist

mail + *man* = mailman

The suffix *-ist* and the combining form *-man* can be added to many words. They both add the meaning "one who does something."

Directions: Find the word in column II that matches the definition in column I. Write the word.

I	II
27. person who makes people laugh	countryman
28. person who opens doors	herdsman
29. one who makes copies	humorist
30. one who delivers ice	doorman
31. person who herds animals	iceman
32. one who lives in a rural area	artist
33. person who draws or paints	copyist



by Earl Schenck Miers

Mississippi Steamboat Days

- ¹ Steamboating on the Mississippi began in 1811, when the *New Orleans* was launched on the Monongahela River at Pittsburgh. It was the first steamboat intended for navigation on the Mississippi.
- ² People lined the banks of the river to laugh at the weird device with its hissing engines and fancy paddle wheels. When the spectators learned that the builder of the boat intended to take his wife along on the trip, excitement and scandalized alarm spread through Pittsburgh and up the valley of the Monongahela. No one had ever heard of such folly. People said the boat would surely blow up. Almost everyone in Pittsburgh came down to the river to see the man and the woman exploded into eternity.
- ³ Instead, the *New Orleans* settled nicely in the water and, with a head of steam, clipped through the water at a speed of eight to ten miles an hour. To the people along the banks, success was more astonishing than disaster would have been. Cheer after cheer shook the air.
- ⁴ The trip was successful. The boat navigated the Monongahela, then followed the Ohio to Cairo, Illinois, where it joins the Mississippi. So steamboating came to the Mississippi. Soon people forgot how they had laughed at the very thought of a steamboat navigating the tricky old river.
- ⁵ In 1857, when Mark Twain, born Samuel Clemens, became an apprentice river pilot, steamboating had been a part of the Mississippi scene for a quarter of a century. The steamboat dominated life along the old river. How well Sam knew the magic cry, "S-t-e-a-m-boat a-comin'," that woke his sleepy little

home town of Hannibal, Missouri. Ten minutes before a steamboat touched the dock, the town would be dead, and ten minutes after the boat had departed, the town would return to its snooze. Later, Sam Clemens was to take his pen name from the familiar boatman's sounding call, "mark twain," meaning that the river depth measured two fathoms, or twelve feet of water.

6 Twain's first experience as a cub pilot was aboard the steamer *Paul Jones*, out of New Orleans, and his instructor was the redoubtable Horace Bixby. Bixby knew every point, every rock, every shallow along hundreds of miles of river. He sang out each landmark once: "This is Nine-Mile Point," or "The slack water ends here abreast this bunch of China trees; now we cross over," and expected Twain to remember them forever. The youthful apprentice found this impossible. Moreover, awakened in the night to take his second watch, he fell into such a bad mood that he almost hoped that Bixby would ground the boat. But let Mark Twain tell the story in his own way, as he did in his book *Life on the Mississippi*:

7 "It was a rather dingy night, although a fair number of stars were out. The big mate was at the wheel, and he had the old tub pointed at a star and was holding her straight up the middle of the river. The shores on either hand were not more than a half mile apart, but they seemed wonderfully far away and ever so vague and indistinct. The mate said: 'We've got to land at Jones's plantation, sir.'

8 "The vengeful spirit in me exulted. I said to myself, 'I wish you joy of your job, Mr. Bixby; you'll have a good time finding Mr. Jones's plantation such a night as this; and I hope you never will find it as long as you live.'

9 "Mr. Bixby said to the mate: 'Upper end of the plantation or the lower?'

10 "'Upper.'

11 "'I can't do it. The stumps there are out of the water at this stage. It's no great distance to the lower, and you'll have to get along with that.'

12 "'All right, sir. If Jones don't like it, he'll have to lump it, I reckon.'

13 "... All I desired to ask Mr. Bixby was the simple question whether he was fool enough to really imagine he was going to find that plantation on a night when all plantations were exactly

alike and all the same color. . . . The stars were all gone now and the night was black as ink. I could hear the wheels churn along the bank, but I was not entirely certain that I could see the shore. The voice of the invisible watchman called up from the hurricane deck:

14 "'What's this, sir?'

15 "'Jones's plantation.'

16 "I said to myself, 'I wish I might venture to offer a small bet that it isn't.' But I did not chirp. I only waited to see. Mr. Bixby handled the engine bells, and in due time the boat's nose came to the land, a torch glowed from the fore-castle, a man skipped ashore, a voice on the bank said: 'Gimme de k'yarpetbag, Mass' Jones,' and the next moment we were standing up the river again, all serene."



17 From experiences such as this, Sam Clemens soon learned that there was more to piloting on the Old Mississippi than met the eye. First was the necessity of a memory. "To know the Old and New Testaments by heart," he said, "and be able to recite them glibly, forward or backward, or begin at random anywhere in the book and recite both ways and never trip or make a mistake, is no extravagant mass of knowledge, and no marvelous facility, compared to a pilot's massed knowledge of the Mississippi and his marvelous facility in the handling of it."

18 About three years after Clemens received his pilot's license, the Civil War cut off Mississippi steamboating in its prime. It never fully recovered; just when fine boats like the *Natchez* and the *Robert E. Lee* were reviving the old glory, along came the depression of 1873.

19 The steamboat era will never be forgotten; it is remembered as it was in its heyday, one of the most romantic eras in the history of the Mississippi.

HOW WELL DID YOU READ?

How exact was your reading?

1. The first Mississippi steamboat was the
 - A *New Orleans*
 - B *Robert E. Lee*
 - C *Paul Jones*
2. The first Mississippi steamboat voyage was
 - A more successful than people expected
 - B a complete success except for one thing
 - C not as successful as its owners had hoped
3. In steamboat language, "mark twain" meant
 - A danger ahead
 - B twelve feet of water
 - C shoal to starboard

Did you grasp the main points?

4. At the beginning of the Civil War, Mississippi steamboating was
 - A at its height
 - B slowly dying
 - C recovering from a depression
5. As the boat approached Jones's plantation, Sam hoped Mr. Bixby would
 - A miss the landing completely
 - B let him take the wheel
 - C successfully pick up the passengers

Can you draw the right conclusions?

6. The landing at Jones's plantation succeeded because of the
 - A brightness of the night
 - B ease of navigating the river
 - C pilot's skill
7. Bixby's refusal to land at the upper end of the plantation showed
 - A his complete knowledge of the river
 - B the stubbornness of his nature
 - C his desire to impress the cub engineer

Do you understand why?

8. Samuel Clemens became a river pilot in order to
 - A satisfy a childhood ambition
 - B earn his passage to New Orleans
 - C revive the glory of steamboating
9. The author's purpose in writing this article was to
 - A popularize the writing of Mark Twain
 - B describe steamboat days on the river
 - C demonstrate the worth of the steamboat

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

A. Often you can tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it. This is called getting the meaning from context.

Directions: Find the word in the paragraph that means

1. shocked; outraged (2)
2. foolishness (2)
3. fearsome; formidable (6)
4. dismal (7)
5. rejoiced (3)
6. dare (16)
7. easily; smoothly (17)
8. ability; skill (17)