

# ROB BUYEA



# THE PERFECT SCORE



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## EDUCATORS' GUIDE

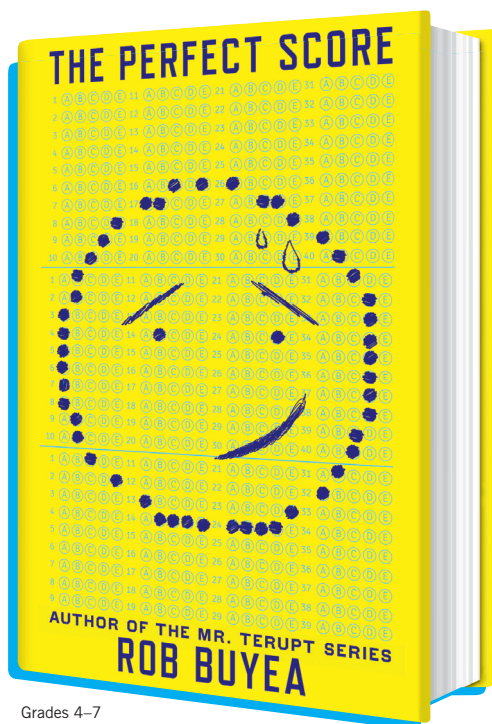
INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS

## ABOUT THE BOOK

No one likes or wants to take the statewide assessment tests. Not the students in Mrs. Woods's sixth-grade class. Not even their teacher. It's not like the kids don't already have things to worry about. . . .

Under pressure to be the top gymnast her mother expects her to be, RANDI starts to wonder what her destiny truly holds. Football-crazy GAVIN has always struggled with reading and feels as dumb as his high school-dropout father. TREVOR acts tough and mean, but as much as he hates school, he hates being home even more. SCOTT has a big brain and an even bigger heart, especially when it comes to his grandfather, but his good intentions always backfire in spectacular ways. NATALIE, know-it-all and aspiring lawyer, loves to follow the rules—only this year, she's about to break them all.

The whole school is in a frenzy as test time approaches—kids, teachers, the administration. Everyone is anxious. When one of the kids has a big idea for acing the tests, they're all in. But things get ugly before they get better, and in the end, the real meaning of the perfect score surprises them all.



Grades 4–7

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Buyea taught third and fourth graders in Bethany, Connecticut, for six years before moving to Massachusetts, where he taught high school biology and coached wrestling at Northfield Mount Hermon. He now lives in North Andover, Massachusetts, with his wife and three daughters and is working as a full-time writer. The novels in the Mr. Terupt series received a number of awards as well as being named to multiple state reading lists. You can learn more about Rob by visiting [RobBuyea.com](http://RobBuyea.com).



Author photo © Glenn Marshall

# PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner: Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “O” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Correlates to Common Core Standards Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, R.L. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas R.L. 4.7, 4.9 R.L. 5.7, 5.9, R.L. 6.7, 6.9.

Before Reading	After Reading	Statements
		It's better to trust your heart than your brain.
		Teachers can profoundly change the lives of their students.
		Parents always know what's best for their children.
		Consequences for bad behavior can result in positive outcomes.


## EXPLORING THE PERFECT SCORE THROUGH WRITING AND RESEARCH

The following questions may be used for group discussion or as reflective writing prompts.

- The opening chapter of *The Perfect Score* is entitled “The Players.” Readers are introduced to Gavin, Randi, Natalie, Scott, and Trevor. Buyea is able to offer readers some initial perspectives on them by using a different font for each character’s name. What can you deduce about each of them from the opening chapter? Did you find that your initial reactions about these characters were accurate? In what ways?
- Trevor tells readers, “I couldn’t wait for school to start—and I didn’t like school. But I liked summer even less. I’d had enough of summer.” (p. 9) Do you believe his opinion of summer is an unusual one? Why or why not? Why might he feel the way he does? How do you feel about summer? In your opinion, what’s the best part? Are there any drawbacks to being out of school?
- Consider the relationship between Gavin and Randi. What makes their friendship unique? In what ways do they support each other? What do you believe to be the biggest challenges to their friendship?


- In BRIEF #3, Natalie shares that “For many, recess was a highlight of the day. I could’ve done without it.” What makes this time rewarding for many students? What is it about this structure (or lack thereof) that bothers Natalie? Is recess a time you find/found enjoyable? Why or why not?
- Randi tells Gavin, “I can’t believe it—we’ve been Brett Favred!” How does learning that Mr. Mitchell is no longer their teacher make them feel? Why does having “some old-lady teacher who they’ve yanked out of retirement to play again” bother them? Do you think their disappointment is warranted? Why or why not?
- Upon entering school on the first day, Natalie reflects, “I had to suppress a smile when I noticed that our desks were lined up in rows and not arranged in groups of four. Finally, a teacher who wasn’t going to make me help these immature, and often dim-witted, classmates of mine.” Why do you think Natalie reacts as she does to finding this arrangement? How can seat arrangements effect classroom dynamics and student interactions?
- Describe Mrs. Magenta and Mrs. Woods. What is it about these teachers that makes them effective? How are Mrs. Magenta and Mrs. Woods different? Can you think of any ways they are similar? Does ultimately learning about the complexity of their relationship change your opinions of either of them? If so, in what way?
- Though some of her practices would be considered traditional and indicate that she is a rule follower (desks in rows, a no-nonsense attitude), how does Mrs. Woods show that she stands up for what she believes is right? In what ways does she teach her students to stand up for themselves?
- Consider the five students/narrators of the novel. Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? Of all the characters, who did you feel was most similar to you in terms of personality or experiences? In your opinion, which character faced the toughest situation? Explain.
- For Gavin, Randi, Natalie, Scott, and Trevor, what are the greatest benefits to participating in the community service project?
- How do the potential outcomes on the CSA exams impact and change the lives of each main character? Do you think their decision to cheat on the tests is justified? Why or why not?
- Describe the relationship between Gavin and Coach. How does Coach impact Gavin’s life? In what ways does having Gavin visit make life better for Coach?
- *The Perfect Score* is told from a first-person multiple narrator perspective. How would the story be different if there were a single narrator telling it? Do you think changing or limiting the points of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
- Trevor shares, “Of all the people who deserved to have something bad happen in life, Scott was last on my list. The kid never did anything but try to help.” (p. 295) In what ways do Scott’s classmates begin to see him in a different light over the course of the novel? Do you find their change of heart to be sincere? Using textual evidence, support your position.

- In your opinion, what is the most important lesson the Recruits learn from their year with each other, Mrs. Magenta, and Mrs. Woods? Imagine you are one of the Recruits. Explain how you would've handled their situation.
- Has there been a time when you did the wrong thing for the right reason? Explain the situation, including when and why.


 Correlates to Common Core Standards Reading Literature: Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Though initially her students find her demeanor to be stern, Mrs. Woods's habit of reading aloud to her class is a way to help her students connect to her, each other, and the world at large. Consider the significance of the books she introduces her students to. How does reading and discussing books like *Wonder*, *Ungifted*, *Shiloh*, *Holes*, and *Nothing but the Truth* change them? Compose a note to Mrs. Woods explaining why you feel like this shared reading experience is so important to her students. Be sure to include a personal anecdote from your own experiences with a favorite novel.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, R.L. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas R.L. 4.7, 4.9, R.L. 5.7, 5.9, R.L. 6.7, 6.9, Writing: Production and Distribution W. 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

- At the end of *The Perfect Score*, Natalie says, "Would I do it all again? It's hard to say. I wouldn't ever advise cheating, but if I were in the same exact predicament, I have a sneaking suspicion the answer might be yes. Sometimes we do the wrong things for the right reasons. It's not always black-and-white. It's tough when your brain and heart don't seem to agree. But I've found it's easier to change your mind than it is your heart. You should follow your heart, because a good heart makes a good person, whereas a good brain can still make a bad person." (p. 351) Do you agree?
- In addition to Natalie, readers also witness Gavin, Randi, Scott, and Trevor choosing to cheat on the CSA tests as a means of helping each other and to make a statement about the school's emphasis on high-stakes testing. Examine the ethical nature of these characters' decisions. Create a character report card by building a table with the main characters' names and the following column headings: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. Add a final column that will serve as a comments section. Under each heading, give the character the letter grade that you believe he or she deserves based on actions and choices made in the book. In the comments section, use two specific pieces of evidence from the novel to explain and support the grade.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, R.L. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas R.L. 4.7, 4.9, R.L. 5.7, 5.9, R.L. 6.7, 6.9, Writing: Production and Distribution W. 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.


• Gavin's struggle with reading has impacted his life and his attitude toward his ability to learn. In what ways do these difficulties shape his sense of self? How do they affect his relationships with his classmates and teachers? Using library resources and the Internet, learn more about reading disorders, especially dyslexia, and be sure to consider the following:

- Are there behaviors or characteristics common to all people with learning disorders? Are all learning disorders the same? Find evidence to support your answer.
- What is the most common disorder that impacts reading?
- How are reading disorders diagnosed?
- How is dyslexia treated?

After gathering facts, create a presentation to share with the class.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 4.7, 5.7, 6.7.


• After observing Mrs. Woods fighting against the standardized tests, Gavin, Randi, Natalie, Scott, and Trevor choose to take a stand like their teacher. They believe that by cheating, they can help one another, while fighting against a testing system that doesn't have their best interests at heart. Do you agree with their choices? Using what you learned in *The Perfect Score*, write a formal letter to the school administration making a case for why these students do or do not deserve punishment for their actions.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, R.L. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas R.L. 4.7, 4.9. R.L. 5.7, 5.9. R.L. 6.7, 6.9. Writing: Production and Distribution W. 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

• Readers witness tremendous growth of the characters in *The Perfect Score*. Select one of the characters and create a first-person journal entry in which you write about an experience that made your character stronger and wiser in some way. Perhaps you struggled through a difficult task or helped a friend with a problem. What did this experience teach you? Be sure to offer specific details about the experience.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Writing: Production and Distribution W. 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

• Choose a favorite scene from *The Perfect Score*. Use that extract to either digitally or manually create a graphic novel. Using a digital comic strip creator such as [makebeliefscomix.com/Comix](http://makebeliefscomix.com/Comix) or [infinitecomic.com](http://infinitecomic.com), come up with storyboards for your chosen scene. Select original art, images, and graphics. Consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering. Alternatively, with a partner, assume the roles of two characters and create an extension of an existing scene.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, R.L. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas R.L. 4.7, 4.9. R.L. 5.7, 5.9. R.L. 6.7, 6.9. Writing: Production and Distribution W. 4.4, 5.4, 6.4.

• Have students engage in any of the projects or activities mentioned over the course of the story: All About Me collages, flower dissections, the King Arthur problem, or exploring with tangrams.

## A CONVERSATION WITH ROB BUYEA

**Q: What was your inspiration for writing *The Perfect Score*?**

**A:** This story came from two places: (1) my experience with kids and the tough decisions they face when growing up, and how sometimes that can mean doing the wrong things for the right reasons—especially when friendship is in the mix, and (2) my frustrations with high-stakes testing in schools, both as a former teacher and as a parent, what that looks and feels like and how it sometimes, unfortunately, leads to things I value in education being squelched.

**Q: Describe your writing process. How do you keep track of all the characters in your stories?**

**A:** My process is mostly revision. There's a lot of fixing and changing and doing over because I don't have it all figured out when I start. I get ideas by doing the work, which means the first draft is really about discovering the full story and learning more about my characters.

I think about my characters and what's most important for each of them, what challenges and surprises might be coming their way. I reflect on my school and life experiences and often find story ideas, and then I wonder how these things might look for each of my characters. For example, my character Randi deals with intense pressure from her mother to excel in gymnastics. I've been involved in wrestling since the age of four. You can bet I've seen these situations along the way, both while competing and as a coach.

I have a complex grid that I use to keep track of my characters month by month or chapter by chapter, so I know what's happening with each one throughout the story. This helps me weave it all together, which takes time, patience, and lots of revising. I also create lists and seem to accumulate notes all over the place. My writing notebook is always nearby and is home to many ideas.

**Q: Tell us about your experiences doing author visits at schools. What is the most commonly asked question from the children? What has been the most surprising question?**

**A:** One of my favorite parts of being an author is visiting schools. Having been a teacher, I'm at ease when talking to kids and I have a good sense of what teachers are working on in the classroom. I often hear from teachers how much they appreciate the way I reinforce what they've been doing—especially when it comes to revision. And by the time I leave, students realize being an author doesn't mean being old and boring.

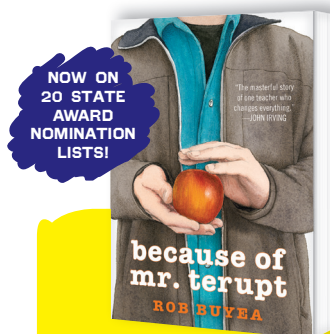
Students always want to know how I come up with ideas and characters (memories help), how long it took me to write the Mr. Terupt books, and who I'm most like from the books.

A young boy in Georgia asked me a question I'll never forget. He wanted to know if I think all people are good people. This is why I like to write for kids.

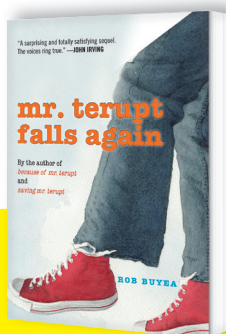
**Q: What can we expect from you next?**

**A:** I'm working on the second book in the series now, tentatively called *The Perfect Secret*. There are new lessons learned, new challenges and surprises (some big ones!), and a secret that will bring the Recruits together, tighter than ever before.

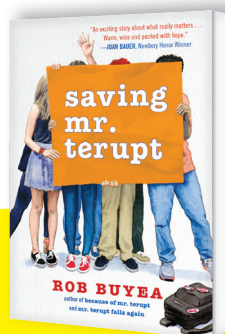
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—*School Library Journal*, Starred

Prepared by Dr. Rose Brock, an assistant professor at Sam Houston State University.  
Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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