

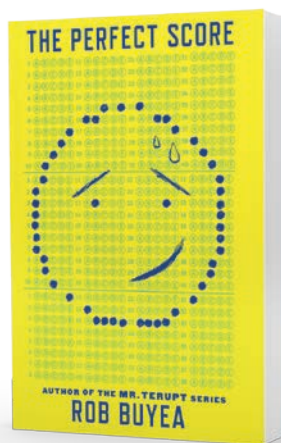
**ROB BUYEA**

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**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**

## ABOUT THE BOOKS



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### THE PERFECT SCORE

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.

### THE PERFECT SECRET

These students are in for a year of secrets, discoveries, and kid power!

GAVIN finally joins the football team—a dream come true!—but Coach Holmes refuses to play him for reasons that also threaten to tear Gavin's family apart. When RANDI attends an elite gymnastics camp, she uncovers a startling family connection. SCOTT starts researching an article for the school newspaper and stumbles right into a hornet's nest of lies. With his loser older brother, Brian, out of the house, TREVOR's life is loads better—until he realizes that only he can save Brian from getting into deep trouble. NATALIE's top goals: (1) find out why Mrs. Woods and Mrs. Magenta no longer speak to each other—a mission shared by all the kids—and (2) teach a certain someone an important life skill without anyone knowing. It's tough keeping secrets. And tougher still to deal with the fallout when secrets spill out.

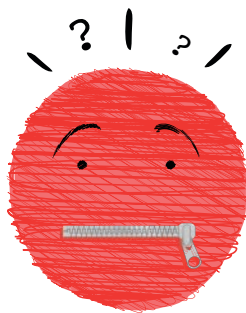
**GRADES**  
4-7

## 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 “0” 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.

Statements	Before Reading	After Reading
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.		
It is acceptable to break rules if you are fighting for something in which you really believe.		
Keeping secrets only hurts people.		
What someone doesn't know can't hurt them.		



## EXPLORING THE BOOKS THROUGH WRITING AND RESEARCH

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

-  Correlates to Common Core Standard reading Literature: Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3.

### FOR THE PERFECT SCORE

- ◆ 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 inferences about these characters were accurate? In what ways?
- ◆ 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 enjoyable? Why or why not?
- ◆ Randi tells Gavin, “I can’t believe it—we’ve been Brett Favred!” (p. 13) 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?
- ◆ Describe and compare Mrs. Magenta and Mrs. Woods. What is it about these teachers that makes them effective? Does ultimately learning about the complexity of their relationship change your opinions of either of them? If so, in what way?
- ◆ Consider the five students/narrators of the novel. Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? 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.

## FOR THE PERFECT SECRET

- ❖ As the novel opens, readers learn that the Recruits want Mrs. Magenta and Mrs. Woods to reconcile. Do you think this is a good idea? In your opinion, what would be the benefits of this happening?
- ❖ Gavin has been reading to his sister, Meggie, and he is incredibly bothered by a line in a Clifford book that states, “He smiles when he loses.” (p. 1) Why does this idea have such a profound effect on him? What can be understood about Gavin from this reaction? Do you think he is overreacting? Why or why not?
- ❖ Randi tells readers, “I knew firsthand what a strained relationship between mother and daughter felt like.” (p. 7) Considering what you discovered in *The Perfect Score*, how has Randi’s relationship with her mother changed? Randi believes Mrs. Magenta deserves a relationship with her mother. Why is this so important to her?
- ❖ What do you think of Natalie’s theory that the more you bring people together, the more likely they are to find common ground? Can you think of any time in your life when this happened?
- ❖ How does Scott’s being given the job of stat man help him better understand his talents? How does his new role help him feel connected with the football team?
- ❖ Trevor tells Mark, “Brian’s gonna find me, you know. At some point our paths are gonna cross. It scares me just thinking about it.” (p. 20) Why is Trevor’s relationship with his brother so problematic?
- ❖ How is Trevor affected by the knowledge that his parents are constantly fighting over his brother Brian? What are his greatest fears, and how does he work through them?
- ❖ During an early visit to the Senior Center, Gavin remarks, “I hope Coach remembers me.” (p. 25) Why is this so important to Gavin? Does the relationship benefit Coach, too? How?
- ❖ After discovering the state of the technology in the Community Hall at the Senior Center, Mark says, “Mrs. Ruggelli, this equipment is from the dinosaur era.” (p. 32) Why do you think it is important to Mark and Trevor to help lead the upgrades at the Senior Center?
- ❖ Describe Agnes and Eddie. Why are these two residents favorites of Randi’s? Are they similar to any elderly people you know? From your perspective, what makes them unique?
- ❖ Eddie tells Natalie and Randi, “We might be old, but we’re not off our rockers yet. . . . We know everything that’s going on around this joint.” In what ways is this true?
- ❖ Randi states, “Keeping all these secrets seemed harmless at first, but now it was beginning to bite back.” (p. 145) What are the greatest challenges of keeping secrets? How does discovering her family’s secrets change Randi? Do you think her life will be better moving forward?
- ❖ Consider the behavior of Coach Holmes, especially with regard to Gavin and his family. Do you feel that the consequences he faces are fair? Explain your position.
- ❖ What do you think should happen to Mrs. Davids? What should be her consequence? Is it fair?
- ❖ How does the reconciliation between Mrs. Magenta and Mrs. Woods impact the Recruits?
- ❖ Given their experiences, predict what adventures may await the Recruits.

# EXTENDED WRITING AND RESEARCH PROMPTS

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 6.1. and Writing: Production and Distribution W. 6.4.

## FOR THE PERFECT SCORE

- 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 to her students. 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.

## FOR THE PERFECT SECRET

- Gavin's mother's status as an undocumented immigrant causes an uproar in their community. Immigration to the United States is a complicated and sensitive issue, but the process of becoming a citizen of the US is extremely complex, difficult, and time consuming. Working with a small team and using [usa.gov/become-us-citizen](http://usa.gov/become-us-citizen), research the steps to becoming a citizen. Write a reflective essay about what you learn, making sure to focus on the parts of the immigration process that surprised you most.
- While discussing the discomfort of defeat and sportsmanship, Coach tells Gavin, "Valentine, it's how we carry ourselves in defeat, how we rise after failure, that tells it all. Because that's when character is revealed." (p. 29) Consider a time when you tried to do something and failed. How did this experience impact you? How did you feel about the situation? What did you learn? Create a personal journal entry to share your experiences. To prepare, create an outline using the five W's: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*. Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, felt, etc.). In conclusion, be sure to share how this experience shaped you—did failure make you better in some way?
- Readers discover several important secrets about Gavin's mother, including the fact that she is unable to read in English, her second language. Adult literacy issues are far more common than many people realize. Using the library and Internet resources, research literacy issues to discover the following:
  - How many Americans are classified as illiterate?
  - What are some of the difficulties illiterate people face, both in everyday life and in trying to learn to read or acquire other new skills?
  - What type of assistance is available to those who want to learn to read?
  - What specific programs are available in your community?Share your findings and brainstorm ideas for service opportunities.

## FOR BOTH BOOKS

- Readers witness tremendous character growth in *The Perfect Score* and *The Perfect Secret*. 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.
- Choose a favorite scene from one of the books. 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.
- It's very likely that social media would be an important means of communication for the major characters in these books. Select a character of your choice and create a faux Facebook page or Twitter handle for that character, being sure to complete all the pertinent information, like education, relationships, groups to follow, pages to like, as well as a few status updates or tweets.



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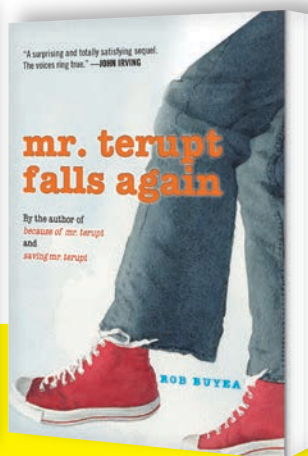
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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).

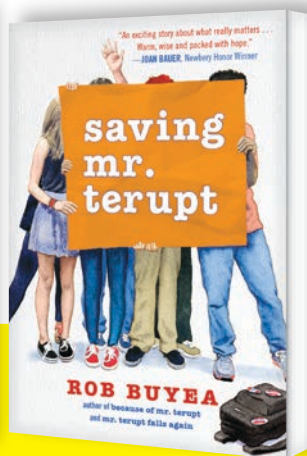
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Dr. Brock holds a PhD in library science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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