

The Scavengers Study Guide

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For the novel by Michael Perry



The Scavengers Study Guide

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Synopsis

Maggie is a girl living life with her family in the wild, in a world very different from those who live in the Bubble Cities. She loves her family, but likes her time alone, also, and when she finds an old car “sunk to the bumpers,” she knows she’s found her refuge and her new name: Ford Falcon.

In Ford Falcon’s world people live UnderBubble or OutBubble—in the protected cities or in the wilderness without electricity, gasoline, or any modern conveniences. Her family lives in a slap-dash shelter on Skullduggery Ridge near Goldmine Gulley, an old trash heap where they scavenge for lumber and supplies for themselves and iron or oddities they might barter or sell. Once a month, her family carries their scavenged treasures down to their neighbors’ house and Ford Falcon joins Toad Hopper to haul scrap iron and other trade items to Nobbern for trade. Toad and Arlinda Hopper live in their old farmhouse on the edge of the government’s genetically modified URCorn fields. URCorn grows so fast you can hear it pop and boom, and it’s supposed to be a miracle food, making people stronger and healthier. But URCorn makes Ford Falcon sick when she tries it, and her father tells her it’s only for the UnderBubble people. It’s also closely guarded and protected by the government.

And then there are the GreyDevils, strange creatures, human mostly, but no one knows where they came from and they’ll do anything for URCorn. They seem to have a deep, dark ache for it, and the only way besides URCorn that they’ve found to damp the ache is to drink PartsWash, something that tastes like it should be used to clean machine parts. Add other oddities, like solar bears, hybrids between grizzlies and polar bears; parrots; and weird weather that decides it’s summer one day, then sleet or snow the next, and you can bet life is not easy. But it’s mostly the GreyDevils that Ford Falcon and Toad and Toby, another neighbor, have to contend with as they ride Toad’s *Scary Pruner* (a play on “prairie schooner”), a cross between a boat and a battle wagon and a circus wagon, to trade their goods in town. GreyDevils will steal anything they can find to buy PartsWash, and they don’t care who they have to go through to get it.

But despite the dangers of GreyDevils and solar bears, there’s something more mysterious going on, and Ford Falcon thinks it has to do with her father. When her parents disappear and she finds her brother Dookie severely injured amid the wreckage of their home, Ford Falcon’s world crumbles. But when her father reappears, her faith in family and everything she knew is shaken to the core.

Then she realizes the only way she can fix her family and find some answers is to journey to the Bubble City and confront the people in charge.

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4. How does Ford Falcon hurt herself digging in Goldmine Gully? What does she find and why might it be important to her and her family?
5. What has happened to the weather and animals that makes it different from the way it used to be?
6. Who are Toad and Arlinda? What is interesting about the way Toad speaks?

Thinking About the Story:

7. In *The Scavengers*, the author makes extensive use of the flow and sounds of words to create mental images and almost a musical effect in some of his phrases or sentences. One way he does this is by frequently using alliteration and consonance. *Alliteration* is a poetic device in which a *beginning* consonant sound is repeated for dramatic impact, such as in *cacophony of crying cats*. The repetition of consonant sounds in the *middle* of words is called *consonance*. A good example of both of these techniques appears at the end of the first paragraph in the introduction:

The old car was sunk to the bumpers when I discovered it, but my first thought was how good it would be to sleep in there and hear the rain drumming on steel rather than splattering against our tattered old tarp.

In this example, the author has blended consonance and alliteration together: *splattering* and *tattered* are consonance, sharing the T sound in the middle of the words. But then *tattered* also has alliteration by sharing the T sound at the beginning with *tarp*.

In the following examples, write an A for alliteration or a C for consonance in the blank next to each sentence to identify the technique used. Then circle the letters that repeat the sound.

- a. _____ Way down in Hoot Holler, Hatchet the Rooster is ruling the roost.
- b. _____ Mostly we are busy scavenging, scrounging, and surviving.
- c. _____ I never get tired of watching them go flapping into freedom, fanning out to peck and scratch and turn their heads sideways to give the bug the beady eye before snapping it into their beaks.
- d. _____ Once Dad dug up an old toy truck with steel wheels....
- e. _____ Then I think of him buried in the dark dirt, packed still and silent in the soil for years and years while the world spun and bubbled with trouble, and suddenly I realize I am

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11. In Chapter 5, Maggie finds an old children's bank in the form of Porky Pig and becomes excited because she thinks she can trade Porky to Mad Mike. Why would an old Porky Pig bank be valuable to anyone? How might this also be similar to the way Maggie's mother feels about reading Emily Dickinson and drinking Earl Grey tea?

12. *Foreshadowing* is a technique authors use to prepare us for a change or coming event in the book or the lives of the characters. It creates a sense of warning or expectation. All through these chapters, Maggie has made observations about her father that sound as if something is wrong or changing. Some of these observations may be very subtle, but some are very clear. Look back through the chapters and find three things she says or observes about her father that seem as if they might be out of the ordinary. What do you think the author might be foreshadowing about Maggie's father?

13. A *proverb* is a short, expressive saying that states a general truth or piece of advice, such as "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched" (the general truth is that you shouldn't count on something happening until it happens) or "Pride comes before the fall" (the general truth being that being proud sets you up for being embarrassed or failure). At the end of Chapter 7, Maggie says,

I wish things were different for Ma.
I wish things were different for Dookie.
Then I take a deep breath and straighten my shoulders. Right now, the best thing the mighty Ford Falcon can do is help Ma make supper.

In the next chapter she says,

But we still have to forage and raise most of our own food and make just about everything from scratch. Out here, you eat what you have, not what you want.

Choose one of the following made-up proverbs and explain how it fits the statements Ford Falcon made.

- a. You get full faster eating oatmeal than wishing for pizza.
- b. A washed dish is better than a strong wish.

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- c. A girl will starve waiting for wishes.
- d. You have to walk on the ground, not in the clouds.

Dig Deeper:

14. In Chapter 4, Ford Falcon meets Toad Hopper, a very interesting old man with an interesting way of speaking. When he meets Ford Falcon, he tells her he's been watching her family and thinks they are "good people." He also tells her, "I figure you could use some help.... I figure," he said, 'you could use a *neighbor*.'
- Read Matthew 22:36–40, Leviticus 19:33–34, 1 Peter 2:11. How do these verses say we should treat our neighbors and strangers or foreigners? How important is it that we follow these instructions? Why should we obey these instructions?
15. Words have both a *denotative* meaning and a *connotative* meaning. The denotative meaning of a word is the meaning that can be found in the dictionary. The connotative meaning of a word is the implied or suggested meaning of the word. It describes the way a word makes you feel or the feelings you associate with the word.
- Read the following sentences, paying close attention to the meaning implied by the underlined words:
- The Petersens had a visitor over for dinner.
- The Petersens had a guest over for dinner.
- Both *visitor* and *guest* mean that the Petersens had an extra person at the table for dinner. But the word *visitor* suggests nothing about the person beyond that he or she is not someone who lives in their home. However, the word *guest* implies someone who was specifically invited and welcomed into their home. *Guest* has a positive connotation, whereas *visitor* has a neutral connotation.
- When Toad first meets Maggie, he tells her not only that he figures that she and her family could use some help, but also that they need a neighbor. What is Toad implying by adding that they "could use a *neighbor*"? What are the connotative associations of *neighbor* in the way that Toad is using it?

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16. Review the verses listed above in question 14 about neighbors and foreigners. How well do Toad's actions comply with the verses above? List three examples of actions he takes that support your answer.

Optional Activities:

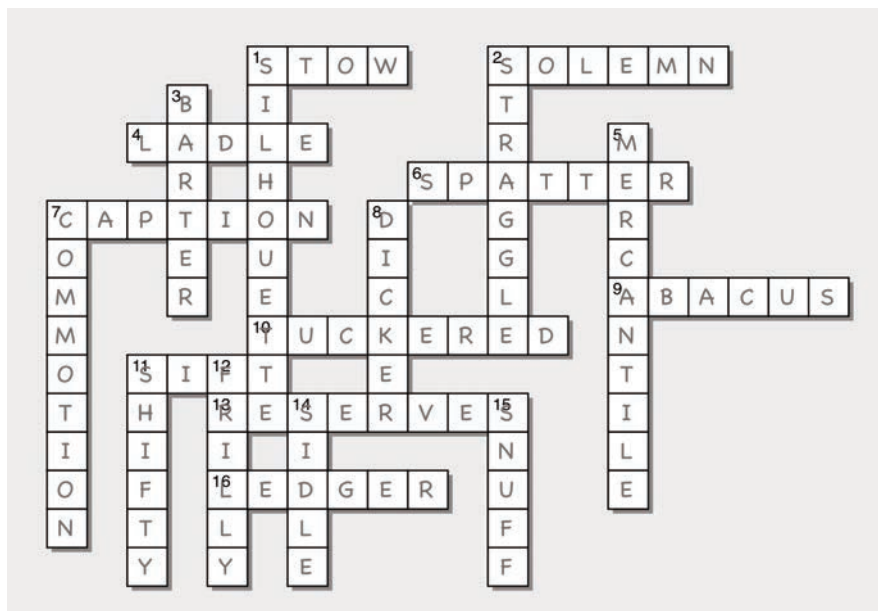
1. In Chapter 5, Ford Falcon mentions that her family uses "hoop houses" for their gardens. Look up hoop houses and learn about how they are made and their functions. If possible, as a class or group project, make a small hoop house and grow some plants to see how it is done. If you grow some food plants, try making a meal of your selections or send them home with each student. As an alternative, you might visit a local greenhouse or farmer who uses hoop houses to learn more about their uses.
2. In Chapter 8, Ford Falcon says, "Out here, you eat what you have, not what you *want*." Though we generally do not eat this way anymore—we can go to the store and buy almost anything at any time because we can import it from other countries—this is how people ate for thousands of years and how many people around the world still eat. Make a list of at least five of your favorite foods (basic foods like tomatoes or strawberries, not foods like spaghetti or chocolate cake) and then describe when those foods would be available if you could only eat them when they are locally harvested. If some of your foods cannot be grown locally (for example kiwis or bananas), describe where they are grown and when they are harvested. You may also wish to describe how the foods on your list might be preserved for use in their off-season.

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Chapters 17–24

Vocabulary:

1. k, 2. f, 3. a, 4. t, 5. g, 6. m, 7. q, 8. c, 9. b, 10. r, 11. l, 12. e, 13. j, 14. d, 15. h, 16. s, 17. i, 18. o, 19. n, 20. p



Questions:

1. They first stop at the blacksmith shop to drop off their scrap metal. Ford Falcon notices, as she always does, that Al's apron is clean and his hammer is unmarked. This means all the work is done by his wife, Freda.
2. Mad Mike is short, bright-eyed, and agile. He wears a green eyeshade, bright orange coveralls, a polka-dotted bow tie, and ballet slippers. Mad Mike runs the Magical Mercantile, where he sells "everything you can imagine and even more things you can't imagine," meaning almost anything people bring in to trade, but especially odd or hard-to-find things. It is rumored that you can even buy guns from Mad Mike.
3. Banker Bernice is the banker for Nobbern, keeping track of how many BarterBucks everyone has in their account. She keeps everything written in a ledger and she also keeps records of the BarterBucks in envelopes locked in safety deposit boxes in a safe so everyone has a backup record of the number of BarterBucks they have. Toad tells Ford Falcon that Bernice is good for the job because she treats every person and every number the same, she does not get excited about the number of BarterBucks people bring in, whether high or low. It is all just recordkeeping for her. Because she treats everything the same, she is unlikely to want to talk about the numbers people bring in, sharing their secrets.
4. The GreyDevils do not attack the *Scary Pruner* on their way to Nobbern because they are not awake enough yet—they are still sick from drinking PartsWash the night before. By the time the *Scary Pruner* is returning from Nobbern, it is late in the day and the GreyDevils are awake and restless.

Thinking About the Story:

5. Ford Falcon's statement is similar to the two quotes because she recognizes the lucky part of her find—the part she can't control, that the pig is buried in that spot—but she also recognizes that if