In Search of the Elusive Wild Mallard
by Shayna Gray (p. 79)

Prereading: U.S.A. Culture

The narrator of “In Search of the Elusive Wild Mallard” describes a relatively unusual event for many American teens. Interested in and knowledgeable about the habits of mallards, the narrator describes the process of preparing to catch and the actual catching of the mallard. While many young people in rural areas are aware of many aspects of natural phenomena and the outdoors, the narrator’s enthusiasm for finding the mallard is relatively uncommon among teens in the U.S. The story presents many opportunities for students to talk about their own relationships to nature and/or other pastimes and passionate interests, which may or may not include the great outdoors.

Reading and Conversation

Ask students to share their reactions to the story. Are there any questions about the content? Does anyone feel that the narrator should not have taken the mallard home? Do any of the students have strong reactions to the notion of hunting—either for or against? After the whole group discussion, break students into small groups of three or four. Ask them to choose some aspect of the whole group discussion to discuss further. They can talk about hunting, for example, or about other issues raised during the previous discussion. Encourage students to think about the story and the ideas it raises, and to be creative. What about retelling the story from the mallard’s point of view? Who are the people in the author’s family? How do they feel about the mallard at first? What helps them learn to accept her presence? How would people in the students’ families respond to their bringing home a similarly unusual pet?

Writing

Ask students to write about any of the topics they’ve discussed during the small group session OR to write a descriptive piece about a passion of their own. As well, students can write about pets, their relationships with their pets, and/or anecdotes about the pets.

Comprehension Check for “In Search of the Elusive Wild Mallard”

Answer key to the exercise on the Student’s Page.
1. b
2. a
3. b
4. c
5. c
6. d
7. a
8. d
In Search of the Elusive Wild Mallard

Name _____________________________ Date _____________

Vocabulary: Words to Watch

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intrepid    brave; daring; bold
quest       hunt; pursuit
elusive     evasive; difficult to locate
mallard     a species of duck
hen          female fowl (e.g., duck or chicken)
fierce      brutal; savage
camouflage  concealment; disguise
irresistible tempting; alluring; impossible to resist; extremely desirable
aroused     frightened; alarmed; disturbed
assembled   brought together
bread ties  small wires covered in thick paper, used for tying shut the twisted ends of plastic bags

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hyper       (slang) hyperactive; very busy; energetic; moving about quickly
bills        mouths of ducks; beaks
acquired     came to have
logical      rational; reasonable
mosquito     chemical substance applied to keep mosquitoes away
repellent    chemical substance applied to keep mosquitoes away
dehydrated  dry; without water or liquid; something from which water has been removed
concoction  mixture
choking      gagging; being unable to breathe because air cannot enter the lungs
abdominal   spasms of pain in the area below the stomach
seizures    spasms of pain in the area below the stomach

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willow-overhung covered by the long, drooping branches of a willow tree
broody      sulky; unhappy; unsettled
shallow     not deep
ford        cross
slimy       wet, sticky, and slippery
bark        hit
shin        front part of the leg between the knee and the ankle
flopped     moved clumsily
nimbly      easily; without effort
coma        state of unconsciousness
luxuriant   abundant; thick
prickly     sharp; pointed; spiked
inconsiderate without thought of others; selfish

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adorable    delightful; darling; wonderful
naturalists people whose work or interest focuses on aspects of nature
accept      welcome; approve of
Vocabulary in Context: Adjectives

“In Search of the Elusive Wild Mallard” contains a number of adjectives, words which describe nouns. Find the words listed below in the story, and find another adjective to replace the word in bold type. Finally, on a separate piece of paper, write your own sentences using the words in bold type. If you’re unsure of their meaning, use a dictionary or ask a classmate for assistance. The first one is done for you.

1. Being an intrepid type of person, one day in the spring I decided to go on a quest for that most elusive of birds, the wild mallard.
   - Being a fearless type of person, one day in the spring I decided to go on a quest for that bird, the most difficult to find, the untamed mallard.
   - My friend Patricia is such an intrepid shopper that she'll spend weeks searching for elusive bargains. Although she would never survive an encounter with a wild animal, she can shop for hours in a mall crowded with shoppers, even during the Christmas rush.

2. Now this was not as easy as it may sound to you, for the wild mallard, especially the hen, is loud and fierce and will bite to death if captured. (p. 79)

3. Handling one of these irresistible creatures when it is aroused could cost you your earlobe, the tip of your nose, or your eyebrows. (p. 79)

4. I was dirty, hot, tired, miserable, and covered with mosquito bites. (p. 80)

5. By the sound of her I could tell she was broody, for the chicks were quite agitated. (p. 81)

6. I managed to grab her by her tail feathers, and we both fell into a thick, luxuriant growth of prickly sandburs. (p. 81)

7. Oh, little Mallard, you are the dream, the goal of brave, bold hunters everywhere; and I, I have captured you! (p. 82)

8. She was really very gentle, enjoyed sitting in my hand, loved lettuce and popcorn, and ate Trailblazer's Doom with a lot more gusto than I did. (p. 82)
Comprehension Check for “In Search of the Elusive Wild Mallard”

Circle the letters of all the correct answers. Some questions may have more than one correct answer.

1. The narrator describes herself as being
   a. meek and timid
   b. fearless and bold
   c. shy and retiring
   d. loud and talkative

2. The search for the mallard takes place in the month of
   a. May
   b. March
   c. November
   d. June

3. What equipment does the narrator not take with her?
   a. knee-high boots
   b. a makeup mirror
   c. diving and swimming gear
   d. a fly swatter

4. The narrator describes choking and having abdominal seizures because the food she ate
   a. made her very ill
   b. was poisoned
   c. didn’t taste very good
   d. was moldy

5. When she hears the mallard quacking, she has to __________ in order to get closer to it.
   a. run across a field
   b. swim in deep water
   c. cross the river at a shallow place
   d. borrow a truck and drive to where the mallard was

6. The narrator finally catches the mallard by
   a. shooting her with a tranquilizer gun
   b. hitting her on the head
   c. dropping a net over her head
   d. grabbing her by her tail feathers

7. The narrator’s brother looks at the orange sauce in the grocery store because
   a. orange sauce tastes good on cooked duck
   b. he likes the color
   c. he likes orange sauce on noodles
   d. he likes orange sauce with milk

8. The mallard’s name is
   a. Shayna
   b. Elizabeth
   c. Felicity
   d. Helen