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# **Teaching Reading in the Multi-Level Classroom, Part II**

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## **Workbook**

### **Development and Training**

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# Food Companies Targeting Kids Online

## THE ARTICLE

Ever-greedy corporate marketers have found a new means of ensnaring children into the net of consumerism. Not content with bombarding kids on TV, in the streets and at schools, marketing executives are utilizing Internet games to tout their wares to unsuspecting children. The latest insidious and pernicious ploy of more than eighty percent of the world's chocolate and snack food companies has been brought to light in a new report, entitled "It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children". It is "the first comprehensive analysis of the nature and scope of online food advertising to children". The research was commissioned by America's Kaiser Family Foundation and exposes the questionable tactics of companies such as Mars, Hersheys and McDonalds in targeting children to promote their products. The latter company, in particular, focuses its ads more on enticing kids with cheap, giveaway toys than food.

The report sadly increases the likelihood of a new word entering the English vocabulary – the "advergame" – an immoral and callous technique to get kids hooked while having online fun. In addition, a variety of other advertising and marketing tactics designed to lure kids into spending an unlimited amount of online time being blitzed with corporate logos are employed on these sites. These include viral marketing (encouraging children to contact their peers about a specific product or brand, found on 64% of sites); sweepstakes and promotions (65%); memberships (25%); on-demand access to TV ads (53%); and incentives for product purchase (38%). Kaiser's William Dietz said the scale of this advertising was an "eye opener". It raises ethical concerns about the role food advertising plays in childhood obesity. Kaiser vice president Vicky Rideout warned the reach of online advertising is much deeper than that of television.

## WARM-UPS

**1. GAMES:** Walk around the class and talk to other students about computer games and the dangers to children. Ask what kind of games food companies might put online for children. Share your findings with new partners.

**2. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Greed / consumerism / marketing / ploys / chocolate companies / tactics / nutrition / vocabulary / immorality / logos / peers / promotions / eye openers / obesity*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**3. MARKETING:** Ask your partner(s) about which of these products it is OK for companies to target children using ads. Write down from what age it is OK to target children. Share your thoughts with new partners.

\_\_\_\_\_ Hamburgers

\_\_\_\_\_ Cola

\_\_\_\_\_ Sportswear

\_\_\_\_\_ Condoms

\_\_\_\_\_ Music CDs

\_\_\_\_\_ Computer games

\_\_\_\_\_ Cosmetics

\_\_\_\_\_ Mobile phones

**4. QUICK DEBATE:** Students A believe there is nothing wrong with food companies targeting children. Students B food companies that target children are the lowest of the low. Debate this with your partners. Change partners often.

**5. ADVERTISING:** With your partner(s), talk about the advertising of the following (or similar) companies. Rate whether or not the advertising techniques used by the companies are bad for kids (10 = shockingly bad / 1 = not at all bad).

- |                              |                                  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| _____ McDonalds              | _____ Baskin Robbins (ice cream) |
| _____ Coca Cola / Pepsi Cola | _____ Pizza Hut                  |
| _____ Snickers               | _____ Dunkin' Donuts             |
| _____ Wrigley's Gum          | _____ Other _____                |

**6. CONSUMERISM:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with consumerism. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. Marketeers have found a way of protecting kids from consumerism.      | T / F |
| b. Some kids are bombarded with advertising at school.                   | T / F |
| c. Over 80% of food companies use the Internet to target kids.           | T / F |
| d. McDonalds ads for kids focus heavily on its burgers and healthy food. | T / F |
| e. "Advergame" may become a new English word.                            | T / F |
| f. "Viral marketing" is all about making children aware of bugs.         | T / F |
| g. A report spokesperson said the findings were not so interesting.      | T / F |
| h. Advertising to kids on TV reaches deeper than advertising online.     | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. greedy     | impact         |
| b. bombarding | peddle         |
| c. tout       | induce         |
| d. Insidious  | uncaring       |
| e. enticing   | money-grabbing |
| f. callous    | contemporaries |
| g. lure       | sly            |
| h. peers      | encouragement  |
| i. incentives | inundating     |
| j. reach      | tempting       |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. ensnaring children       | pernicious ploy                      |
| b. tout                     | much deeper than that of television  |
| c. The latest insidious and | and scope of online food advertising |
| d. analysis of the nature   | ethical concerns                     |
| e. exposes the questionable | into the net of consumerism          |
| f. increases                | tactics of companies                 |

- |    |                                    |                        |
|----|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| g. | being blitzed                      | to contact their peers |
| h. | encouraging children               | their wares            |
| i. | It raises                          | the likelihood of      |
| j. | the reach of online advertising is | with corporate logos   |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

### Food companies targeting kids online

\_\_\_\_\_greedy corporate marketeers have found a new means of ensnaring children into the net of consumerism. Not \_\_\_\_\_ with bombarding kids on TV, in the streets and at schools, marketing executives are utilizing Internet games to \_\_\_\_\_ their wares to unsuspecting children. The latest insidious and pernicious \_\_\_\_\_ of more than eighty percent of the world's chocolate and snack food companies has been brought to \_\_\_\_\_ in a new report, entitled "It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children". It is "the first comprehensive analysis of the nature and \_\_\_\_\_ of online food advertising to children". The research was commissioned by America's Kaiser Family Foundation and exposes the questionable \_\_\_\_\_ of companies such as Mars, Hersheys and McDonalds in targeting children to promote their products. The latter company, in particular, focuses its ads more on enticing kids with cheap \_\_\_\_\_ toys than food.

*light  
content  
giveaway  
ploy  
ever  
tactics  
tout  
scope*

The report \_\_\_\_\_ increases the likelihood of a new word entering the English vocabulary – the "advergame" – an immoral and callous technique to get kids \_\_\_\_\_ while having online fun. In addition, a variety of other advertising and marketing tactics designed to lure kids into spending an \_\_\_\_\_ amount of online time being \_\_\_\_\_ with corporate logos are employed on these sites. These include viral marketing (encouraging children to contact their \_\_\_\_\_ about a specific product or brand, found on 64% of sites); sweepstakes and promotions (65%); memberships (25%); on-demand \_\_\_\_\_ to TV ads (53%); and incentives for product purchase (38%). Kaiser's William Dietz said the scale of this advertising was an "eye opener". It \_\_\_\_\_ ethical concerns about the role food advertising plays in childhood obesity. Kaiser vice president Vicky Rideout warned the \_\_\_\_\_ of online advertising is much deeper than that of television.

*reach  
unlimited  
access  
hooked  
peers  
raises  
sadly  
blitzed*

## LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### Food companies targeting kids online

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## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries/computer to find other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words ‘lure’ and ‘hook’.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT “ADVERGAME” SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about the ethics of food companies using Internet games to tout their wares to children.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |           |          |
|-----------|----------|
| • means   | • sadly  |
| • wares   | • lure   |
| • ploy    | • viral  |
| • scope   | • access |
| • tactics | • scale  |
| • latter  | • reach  |

## DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?

- b. Have you heard of advergames before?
- c. Do you think it is just a sign of the times that food companies are targeting kids and nothing to worry about?
- d. Do you think the executives designing games to lure children to their products have bad morals?
- e. What kind of laws do you think should be placed on advergames?
- f. Do you think kids are sensible enough to know food companies are trying to manipulate them?
- g. What do you think of food companies placing advertisements in schools?
- h. Are you concerned that McDonald's ads that target kids focus on cheap, giveaway toys and not food?
- i. Would you allow your child to play online games that encourage children to buy hamburgers and soft drinks?
- j. What do you think of the word 'advergame'?

**STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)**

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read – was it an eye opener?
- c. What do you think of the technique of viral marketing whereby kids mail their friends to recommend a new product?
- d. Is it OK for junk food companies to tell kids they can get extra powers in games by buying products that contain special codes?
- e. Is television advertising or online advertising more dangerous?
- f. Do you like Ronald McDonald?
- g. Do you think the advergames could be good for kids?
- h. Games tell kids they can view TV ads online "over and over right now" instead of having to wait for them to be on TV. Is this OK?
- i. Would you like your child to have a McDonald's screensaver?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

**SPEAKING**

**ADVERLIFE:** Imagine you are a marketing executive for a junk food company. With your marketing partner(s), write down some strategies for the areas below to entice children into getting hooked on your products:

	Strategies
School	
Internet	
Place of worship	
Hospital	

Library	
Playground	

- Change partners and share your ideas.
- Discuss whether each of your ideas are ethical or not.
- Are there any companies doing these things now?
- Do you think the ideas you thought of above will be commonplace in the future?

## HOMEWORK

1. **VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. **INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information about advergaming. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. **SURVEY:** Conduct a survey of your family and friends. Find out their opinions on advergaming. Share what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson.

4. **LETTER:** Write a letter to the advertising executives designing new tactics to get children to be consumers. Ask them three questions. Which letter did you like best and why? Your partner(s) will answer your questions in the next lesson.

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

a. F      b. T      c. T      d. F      e. T      f. F      g. F      h. F

### SYNONYM MATCH:

a. greedy	money-grabbing
b. bombarding	inundating
c. tout	peddle
d. insidious	sly
e. enticing	tempting
f. callous	uncaring
g. lure	induce
h. peers	contemporaries
i. incentives	encouragement
j. reach	impact

### PHRASE MATCH:

a. ensnaring children	into the net of consumerism
b. tout	their wares
c. The latest insidious and	pernicious ploy
d. analysis of the nature	and scope of online food advertising
e. exposes the questionable	tactics of companies
f. increases	the likelihood of
g. being blitzed	with corporate logos

- |    |                                    |                                     |
|----|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| h. | encouraging children               | to contact their peers              |
| i. | It raises                          | ethical concerns                    |
| j. | the reach of online advertising is | much deeper than that of television |

**GAP FILL:**

**Food companies targeting kids online**

**Ever-greedy** corporate marketeers have found a new means of ensnaring children into the net of consumerism. Not **content** with bombarding kids on TV, in the streets and at schools, marketing executives are utilizing Internet games to **tout** their wares to unsuspecting children. The latest insidious and pernicious **ploy** of more than eighty percent of the world's chocolate and snack food companies has been brought to **light** in a new report, entitled "It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children". It is "the first comprehensive analysis of the nature and **scope** of online food advertising to children". The research was commissioned by America's Kaiser Family Foundation and exposes the questionable **tactics** of companies such as Mars, Hersheys and McDonalds in targeting children to promote their products. The latter company, in particular, focuses its ads more on enticing kids with cheap, **giveaway** toys than food.

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Breaking News English.com. Ready-to-use ESL/EFL Lessons. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 01/04/07 at: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0607/060724-advergames.html>.

### Sustained Silent Reading Reflection Log

**Directions:** At the end of each SSR period, pick one or two of the following active reading strategies to use for reflecting on what you read. Use the sentence starters provided to get you started. After you have filled both boxes, make a check next to each reading strategy you used in your reflections.

- **Summarize:** "This book/article/story is about \_\_\_\_\_." "The main character in the book/article/story \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Predict:** "Based on \_\_\_\_\_, I predict that \_\_\_\_\_." Later in the book/article/story, I think that \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Connect:** "This book/article/story is like my life because \_\_\_\_\_." "This book/article/story is similar to the book/article/story \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Evaluate:** "I think the author is a good/bad writer because \_\_\_\_\_." I like/do not like this book/article/story because \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Question:** "When I read the part about \_\_\_\_\_, it made me wonder \_\_\_\_\_." "I wonder why the author chose to \_\_\_\_\_?" I think it might be because \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Visualize:** "When I read the part about \_\_\_\_\_, I pictured \_\_\_\_\_." "I think the main character looks like \_\_\_\_\_."

<p><b>Text Title:</b></p>  <p><b>Type of Text (novel, magazine, etc.)</b></p>	<p><b>Started page</b> _____</p> <p><b>Ended page</b> _____</p>
<p><b>Text Title:</b></p>  <p><b>Type of Text (novel, magazine, etc.)</b></p>	<p><b>Started page</b> _____</p> <p><b>Ended page</b> _____</p>

Retrieved from the World Wide Web at:  
<http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/index.asp?siteloc=tool&section=sustain>

**"Right There"**  
 "Right There" questions require you to go back to the passage and find the correct information to answer the question. These are sometimes called literal questions because the correct answer can be found somewhere in the passage. "Right There" questions sometimes include the words "According to the passage..." "How many..." "Who is..." "Where is..." "What is..."



**"Think and Search"**  
 "Think and Search" questions usually require you to think about how ideas or information in the passage relate to each other. You will need to look back at the passage, find the information that the question refers to, and then think about how the information or ideas fit together. "Think and Search" questions sometimes include the words "The main idea of the passage..." "What caused..." "Compare/contrast..."



**Question-Answer Relationships**

**"On My Own"**  
 "On My Own" questions can be answered using your background knowledge on a topic. This type of question does not usually appear on tests of reading comprehension because it does not require you to refer to the passage. "On My Own" questions sometimes include the words "In your opinion..." "Based on your experience..." "Think about someone/something you know..."

**"Author and You"**  
 "Author and You" questions require you to use ideas and information that is not stated directly in the passage to answer the question. These questions require you to think about what you have read and formulate your own ideas or opinions. "Author and You" questions sometimes include the words "The author implies..." "The passage suggests..." "The speaker's attitude..."

## Making Inferences with Body Language

Forehead	wrinkles=	anger
Eyebrows	outer edges up=	anger
Eyes	centered=	focused
	gazing up=	thinking
	gazing down=	shame
	gaze to side=	guilt
	wandering=	disinterested, bored
Nose	wrinkled=	disgusted, confused,
	pointed up=	arrogant
Lips	parted, relaxed=	happy
	together=	possibly concerned
	wide open=	very happy, very angry
Arms	crossed=	angry, disapproving
	open=	honest, accepting
Hands	on top of head=	amazement
	scratching head=	puzzled, confused
	rubbing eyes=	tired
	rubbing chin=	thinking
	folded=	timid, shy
Fingers	interlocked	tense
	pointing at you	angry
	OK sign	all is fine
	V sign	"peace"

### Inference Matching

Match the sentence with the type of inference which can be made.

Location	One Sunday morning, the pastor asked me to read some verses from the Bible.
Time	The leaves were starting to turn color.
Action	He volunteered for the Marines.
Instrument	Once it became hot, she began to curl her hair
Object	The majestic peaks were obscured by the clouds.
Category	I have about 900 cards of pitchers, catchers, out-fielders, etc.
Occupation or Pastime	I had to check the medication schedule, review the patient notes, and answer the call button for two people.
Cause-Effect	The roads were blocked and no trains were running, so Dad had to plow a road across the field to the highway.
Problem-Solution	She was getting too old to take care of herself.
Feeling-Attitude	When I received my degree, tears came to my father's eyes.

## What Can You Infer?

### Everyday Life Inferences

You drive into a small town that has two diners. There are two cars at one diner and many cars at the other. Which diner may have better food and prices?

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You come upon a dog in the park and it cringes when you try to pet it. What might you infer?

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You look in the newspaper for a movie to see. One film has a full-page ad with favorable comments from well-known critics. Another movie has a full-page ad with favorable comments from radio stations and newspapers you never heard of. Which may be the better movie?

### Inferences from Text

A famous psychology experiment conducted by Dr. John B. Watson demonstrates that people, like animals, can be conditioned – trained to respond in a particular way to certain stimulations. Watson gave an eleven-month-old baby named Albert a soft, furry rat. Each time Albert tried to stroke the rat, Dr. Watson hit a metal bar with a hammer. Before long, Albert was afraid not only of white rats but also white rabbits, white dogs, and white fur coats. He even screamed at the sight of a Santa Clause mask.

Check the three inferences that can most logically be drawn from the passage.

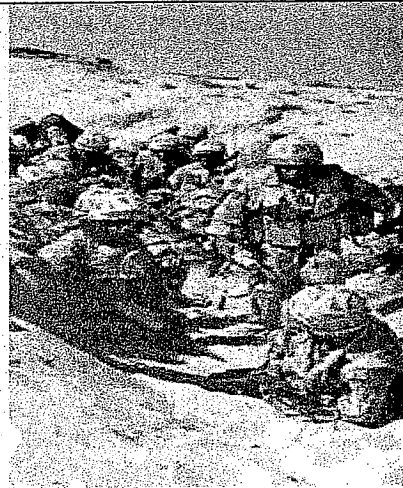
- 1. Dr. Watson did not like small children.
- 2. Before the experiment, Albert was not afraid of white rats.
- 3. Albert had been familiar with rats before the experiment.
- 4. If he had seen a black fur coat, Albert would have screamed.
- 5. Albert connected the loud noise of the hammer striking the metal bar with the white rat.
- 6. Albert was afraid of unexpected loud noises.

George Washington's honesty is a trait that has been well publicized. The famous story of how little George chopped down his father's favorite cherry tree, and then bravely admitted to the deed, has an honored place in American presidential history. The cherry tree story was first recorded in 1806 by Parson Mason Weems, a Maryland preacher and storyteller. Unfortunately, Parson Weems was none too honest himself, and it appears that he invented the story of George and the cherry tree. There is no record of the cherry tree incident anywhere until it appears in Weems's book. The parson, it seems, thought it acceptable to teach the virtue of honesty through a made-up story. We can judge Weems's own truthfulness by the fact that he describes himself in the books as "formerly rector of Mount Vernon Parish." Such a parish never existed.

What are three things you can infer from the text?

Picture That!

What can you infer from each photograph?



## **A Passion for Chocolate**

### **Milton Hershey**

Two men are at the root of America's chocolate history. One is Milton S. Hershey; the other is Forrest Mars. Both have rather sad stories.

Hershey was born in rural Pennsylvania to Mennonite parents who didn't agree on much. His mother was a strict observer of the frugal religion. His father could have been a changeling – he read Shakespeare, loved science and politics and was a dreamer. He also was a dismal failure at all he tried.

(So much did his mother despise his father that when he died, she left his deathbed, piled all of his books into a nearby field and danced around the bonfire she had lit.)

Hershey ended up with his father's dreams and, it appears, none of his mother's meanness.

After several missteps of his own (two failed candy operations, one at the over expansion urgings of his father), he hit on a winner with a caramel factory in Lancaster, PA. In 1898, at the age of 41 and very wealthy, he married. In 1900, he sold the nation's No. 1 caramel factory for \$1 million.

And then it was on to chocolate. But more than chocolate – he wanted his own Candyland. He purchased 1,200 acres of farmland near his birthplace and set to work.

Eventually, Hershey, Pa., would house the Hershey factory, schools, houses, a library, a hospital, and most important, an orphanage – Hershey School.

Today, all profit of this public company is invested in the Hershey Trust to be directed to the school's 1,000 orphans and abandoned children from mostly inner cities. Those children receive the equivalent of a \$35,000-a-year education at the behest of Milton Hershey, who died in 1945 as a widower with no heirs. The trust is now worth \$5 billion.

### **Forrest S. Mars**

Forrest Mars has a background just as mean in spirit as Hershey's. His parents divorced after his dreamer of a father tried and failed at several candy companies – usually leaving town just before the bill collectors arrived.

Forrest was sent to live with his mother's parents in Canada. With the help of a very quick mind, he landed a scholarship to the University of California at Berkeley in 1922.

By odd happenstance, he met up with his father, whom he hadn't seen since he was 6, in Chicago. And his father was still in the candy business – albeit with more success this time. He was making buttercreams and selling them, like most candy makers, locally. Only Milton Hershey was selling a national product.

Mars and his father came up with the idea for the Milky Way – a big, fat, nougat candy bar that could compete with the flat 5-cent Hershey bar. The first year it was on the market, 1924, the Milky Way raked in \$800,000.

Forrest was on his way. But not before having a falling-out with his father (he was absent from his father's funeral).

Or before his father-in-law had to rescue his daughter and grandchildren from the unheated apartment that Forrest had rented so that he could put more money into his business. And not before badgering his cancer-stricken half-sister to sell him her part of his father's company.

Forrest died in 1999 at age 95. Mars, a private company is still run by his three children in McLean, Va.

The trio tied for the 40th-richest American on the 2000 Forbes list, with \$7 billion each.

*Article from Palm Beach Post, 2000*

## **Integrating Writing and Reading in the Adult Education Classroom**

### **Sample Lesson**

#### **Pre-reading**

Write in your journal about something you were afraid of in your childhood.

#### **Communal Writing Activity**

Teacher should identify vocabulary that students might not know. Provide a list and brief definition of each word. Have students work with a partner or group to create their own story using the words. Share the stories with the whole group.

#### **Sample vocabulary**

Kudzu	Lull	Whippoorwills
Heartier	Carcass	Muscadines
Ruffians	Hooligans	Mayhem

#### **Reading**

As you read, look for metaphors, where the narrator draws a comparison for the reader. For example, the narrator compares the tree limbs covered in kudzu to a canopy bed. Are there other examples of figurative language in the selection? (Assumption is made that concept has been taught.)

#### **After Reading**

Look back at your journal entry about something you feared as a child. Now write about how you handled that fear as you grew up. Did you overcome your feelings or do you continue to struggle with the same sense of fear?

Draw a timeline illustrating the events in the story that occurred as the narrator got older.

## Kudzu (an excerpt)

Editor's Choice  
By Graham Dunstan

I have no doubt it will be there forever, that it will one day overrun our yard and draw itself in tight green knots about our house. The kudzu has already claimed my childhood. It is entangled in everything I remember.

I can see it as if I'm standing on the deck of our house for the first time, the day we moved. I see our back yard, and the deep ditch that separates the new grass from the large field of kudzu on the other side. My father is standing at the edge of the ditch and I walk to him.

It will be an uphill battle, he tells me on one knee. He fingers a vine and looks up at me. The kudzu was here before the house, he says.

The pine trees on the other side of the ditch are drowning in the kudzu, strangled by it, transformed into strange, enormous shapes. I look out at the green mounds and imagine they are giants who have fallen asleep, covered by preying vines. If the kudzu can trap the trees, I know my father and I are certainly no match for it.

But I can't stop watching it those first days in our house. Watching it grow towards us, inching closer day by day. I can't stop listening to it call to me. Call to us, me and my brother and my two cousins. It called our names as children. Singing in the day — the trills of blue jays and whippoorwills, the smells of honeysuckle and blackberries, daring us to go back there. But we knew to be careful. We knew it wanted us, wanted to lull us into forgetting how dangerous it was as we walked through its waist deep vines. In the day we took the chance, even though we were afraid. But on hot summer nights, when we raced into the back yard with jars and lids, we would stop at the kudzu. We'd chase the lightning bugs until they went over the slinking dark leaves, out of our reach, and we'd stop at the ditch, because at night we didn't dare enter it. We wouldn't wade through the gnarled green vines, through the moon shadows of the pine trees. We knew it would drown us.

So we would sit down in the ditch, our backs against the dirt. We'd stare up at the kudzu, wanting to get closer, but not daring to.

The ditch was all that kept it back. A natural defense against the plant, a trench someone else had dug for the war my father eventually fought. He would try to cut the kudzu, and burn it, but it always came back, heartier than before.

We looked up at the kudzu those nights in the ditch, watching the lightning bugs escape. We would sit until we could feel our backs against the dirt, wet from the heat. The sweat ran down the sides of our bodies from under our arms, it was so hot. We'd talk about everything — Alex, Angie, Laura and me — about the other kids in the neighborhood, the teachers we hated, and what our parents had done that day to make us mad. And we would talk about sex.

As far as we knew, boys and girls were boys and girls, although we did have an idea there was more to it than that. But for me, in fourth grade, to go with someone meant you put your hand in her back pocket when you walked down the hall to lunch. She might do the same to you. It wasn't something scary. At that age the kudzu was the only thing I had to be afraid of. I'd seen it.

I had seen my father pull at a few vines of the kudzu and put his ear to the ground. Listen, he said. You can hear the snakes down there. Rattlers. Diamondbacks. Listen.

And you could. Down there, hissing, stretching, like the kudzu itself. I was afraid. I could hear it, the slinking, the shifting, like the sound of hands digging in wet sand.

I watched my father as he cleared a patch of the kudzu and poured gasoline down the snake hole. A few rattlers tried to escape, yellow and tan, five and six feet long. They shot out, heading for the kudzu, for a

place to hide from my father and the whish of his down-swinging hoe. But he never missed one. Not that I saw. I got four rattles that summer. My brother got two.

There were other things just as deadly in the kudzu, but the danger made it more exciting. We cut through the vines in the day to get to blackberry patches where there were berries the size of golf balls. I was sure that every brush of my elbow, every prick of a thorn was a black widow, its red hourglass smiling on my leg.

And at night, after dinner and blackberry cobbler, I would go and sit on the cold tiles of the bathroom floor as my mother sat on the toilet lid and ran her fingers through my hair, searching for ticks. Sometimes she had to use a lighter and a pin to get them to let go.

Count the holes, she would say, putting her leg in front of my face, trying to distract me. She'd pull up her nightshirt a bit. How many?

I would touch them. One. Two. Threefourfive. Up her leg. Small dots from where she fell onto the barbed wire fence from the horse. Six. Seven. That was all I could see.

The kudzu hid things like barbed wire, other things too. Nails and horseshoes, tin roofs from old sheds, waiting under the vines, ready to trip you. Ready to cut you. But as we walked through it, we hoped with every step we would stumble across the carcass of a rotting animal, a skeleton from the Civil War, or better yet, a body.

We looked for those treasures, but we never found them. Just the trash, the junk other people had left behind. Once we found three used rubbers and a blanket far back in the field under an oak. We knew Jay Whitener had been out there with his girlfriend. We had seen him before, watching us in the kudzu, eyeing our secret hiding place.

The blanket, under tree limbs covered in kudzu, looked like a canopy bed. It hadn't been there the day before. My cousin Angie lay down on it in the indention they'd made in the soft dirt, clay and damp leaves beneath.

That day we took the blanket and spread it out on the front porch of the Whiteners' house, the rubbers lying on top. We never found evidence of Jay or his girlfriend in our kudzu again. That was when we knew it belonged to us. Dangerous or not, whether it scared us or not, it was ours.

We made hidden forts out of scraps of metal and wood we found in the kudzu. Then we'd spend hours beating and trampling trails that led back there so we could throw muscadines at Old Man Rucker and escape. He'd chase after us screaming, his thumbless right hand clutched into a fist. You little ruffians!

Damn hooligans, he'd shout.

And we'd listen, just out of sight, bunched together on our stomachs in the green tunnels of our world.

We'd laugh and laugh at him, and he'd finally walk away, cursing at us. Damn hooligans, getting softer and softer.

By the time I was in middle school, we were spending our whole summers out there. We'd go out after lunch and not come home until seven or eight at night. We would have two or three forts to build and blackberries to pick, or we'd have to stock up for our many wars — green pine cones that were so sharp they hurt your fingers to even put them in a bag, and puffy brown mushrooms that would explode with a green poof when they hit you.

One day my brother and I were going to get Angie and Laura to help us dam a creek. But as we were walking to their house, we met Angie halfway, at the road.

Where's Laura, my brother asked.

Angie frowned and said, Mom says we can't go back there anymore. She says girls and boys shouldn't play alone in the kudzu.

Dumb, my brother yelled. That's dumb!

But I looked at her and I knew. I thought of when Angie lay there on that blanket with the rubbers. Her mother was afraid of things other than ticks and snakes, nails and spiders.

Alex and I hung around our cousins less and less, but sometimes, after dinner, just before it got dark, I'd find Angie out in the kudzu alone.

The first moments we stared at each other felt dangerous. We were alone out there and weren't supposed to be. Almost always Angie would break the silence.

Third cousins can marry, she'd say straight-faced, then laugh.

Or, take me now, please just take me now!

I spent more and more time in the kudzu, sometimes alone, and by junior high my fear of it had worn down. At night I'd go out there with some guys from school. We would stroll along the ditch, the boundary of the kudzu, until we came to the road. Walking in the groaning dark of the crickets, we'd tell ghost stories and talk about murderers and rapists, slapping the lightning bugs from our faces.

We'd walk up Pruitt and Charlotte Drive and begin our mayhem, the kudzu our only witness. It watched us set up small pyramids of Coke cans in the road and wait for cars to send the cans flying. It watched us roll houses and trees with toilet paper until they were ghostly white. It crept up the wall of our old elementary school, and saw us sneak in through a window and steal chocolate milks from the cafeteria. It climbed the fence of our neighbors who were out of town, and watched as we leapt naked and laughing from the roof of their house down into the dark shadows of the swimming pool. It saw us steal each others' clothes and chase around the pool, the moonlight glistening on our backs and shoulders.

The kudzu watched me grow up. I spent more time on my stomach, its thick hairy vines and coarse leaves against my legs, than I did with my parents or my friends. Often it was where I went to be alone any time my father was yelling or my brother was being a pest.

When my mother and father got divorced, I went back there to cry. . . .

Graham Dunstan is in the Creative Writing program at University of Alaska Anchorage.

## Getting the GIST: Summarizing the 5Ws and H

Name of Article

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Complete the following.

Who?

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What?

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When?

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Where?

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Why?

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How?

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Write a GIST Statement of 20 words or less that summarizes the text.

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