

Chapters 1 and 2

1. What evidence reveals the Grondowski family's poverty and do you see any evidence that the poverty is widespread in America?

2. What was Josh's special talent and why did he feel secure at Penn High School?

3. What caused Josh's father to become so unhappy?

4. How did Mother respond to Josh's question about leaving home? Why do you think she reacted this way?

5. What were the boys plans when they first left home? Do you think these plans were realistic?

6. How did the hobo make Josh feel uneasy? What happened to confirm Josh's feeling of uneasiness?

Chapters 3 and 4

1. Why were Joey and Josh anxious to get off the train? Why did they refuse to eat with the men who offered food?

2. What decision did the boys make after Howie died? Why did they reach this conclusion?

3. How were the boys able to obtain food and shelter?

4. How have Josh's thoughts and dreams changed?

5. What drove Josh to look through garbage cans for food and how did Joey help find food? Why was Joey's role better for him than Josh?

6. How did the elderly woman in Nebraska help the boys?

7. Why was Josh reluctant at first to share his reason for running from home with Lonnie and why do you think he changed his mind?

8. What mistake did Lonnie reveal to Josh?

Chapter 5

1. Why did Josh have a sense of relief now that he was with Lonnie and why did he keep track of the cost of meals while they were traveling together?

2. Why was Pete Harris hesitant to hire Josh? Why do you think he finally decided to hire him?

3. Describe the men who would be the boys' neighbors.

4. What did Lonnie do that showed he would always care about the boys?

5. Why did Blegan have a negative attitude toward the boys?

6. What was Emily's job and why did it come as a surprise to the boys?

7. What warning did Emily give Josh?

8. How did Josh feel about the way he was expected to act on the first night of the job?
Why did he feel this way?

Chapter 6

1. What was the carnival's most popular act? Why were children fascinated by the act?

2. Why did the boys send money to Lonnie?

3. What did Joey and Josh send home for Christmas and why do you think they did this?

4. How did Emily explain Josh's "blues"? Why did Josh disagree with her?

5. Why did Josh get upset with Emily at the Christmas Eve party?

6. Describe Emily's feelings for Pete.

7. How did Josh feel about Emily and Pete's relationship? Why?

8. How did the fire change Josh's feelings toward Emily? Do you think he is being more realistic now?

Chapter 7

1. Why did Pete have to let Josh go?

2. Josh left the carnival with "mixed emotions." How did he feel about leaving Emily, Pete, Edward C. and New Orleans?

3. Who was Charley and what was his "special" job?

4. What did Josh mean when he said, "We were still able to feel superior to the shallowness of a well-dressed minor hoodlum"? Why did he feel this way?

5. How was the shoe salesman able to get the boys to leave without their twenty dollars?

6. In spite of their loss at the show shop, the boys weren't as poor as they often had been. What did they have to help them get by?

7. Why did Josh feel unhappy about just showing up at Lonnie's door and expecting him to care for them?

8. What did Josh mean when he said he was "pulling his belt a little tighter" and how did Joey spend the last of his money?

Chapter 8

1. What windfall resulted from Joey's attempt to sing and accompany himself on the banjo?

2. What caused the hysterical woman to change her mind and feed the boys and what act of kindness towards the hysterical woman did Joey perform that upset Josh?

3. How did Joey and Josh become separated?

4. What events led to Josh's arrival at Lonnie's house and what did he worry about when he regained consciousness?

5. What historical event did Janey and Josh listen to on the radio?

Chapter 9

1. Where did Lonnie search for Joey?

2. How did the letter from Mom affect Josh?

3. How did Josh explain the earrings to Janey?

4. How did Lonnie feel about Janey and Josh spending time together?

Chapters 10 and 11

1. Why did Lonnie have trouble deciding whether or not to bring Joey home with him?

2. How did Joey help Josh realize that the same difficult circumstances that had affected him had also affected their father?

3. What did Josh feel he had to do before he could return home?

4. How did Mrs. Arthur help Josh find work?

5. How did the Polish song help Josh decide to go home?

6. How was the train ride home different from the train ride they had taken to leave Chicago?

7. Compare Josh's and Joey's thoughts about returning to Chicago?

8. What were Josh's feelings towards their "borrowed" home in Omaha and their home in Chicago?

9. Why did Josh decide to give his dad a chance?
