

# Prophets

by Brennan Stasiewicz (p. 129)



## Prereading: U.S.A. Culture

The author of this story describes **a typical small town** in the midwestern United States. It is common for people in small towns to know one another very well. Mark Twain's fiction is known for depictions of small-town life in the South during the Civil War years. Richard Ford, a contemporary adult novelist, also writes of boyhood years, including quests and challenges involving physical strength and will. This story reflects more contemporary concerns and captures **certain attitudes prevalent among adolescent males**. Note the contrast between the narrator's casual tone and his reflections on Jim's quest.

The Fourth of July, **Independence Day**, is typically celebrated with parades, picnics, and, after sunset, fireworks.

## Prereading: Prediction

Ask students to think about some difficult task they have accomplished despite the advice and doubts of others. Using the question "Are some dreams too big to come true?" ask students to **describe their dreams or challenges**—including hopes for the future, as well as challenges they may already have faced.

Make notes of the students' responses to review after they've read the story. Have any of your students experienced similar feelings to those described in the story?

## Reading and Conversation

Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to **discuss the questions that follow**:

1. What do you share with your best friend? Do you tell each other secrets?
2. How do you feel when your best friend does something wonderful?
3. How do you feel when your best friend does something horrible?
4. Why do you think Jim has to dig his tunnel?
5. Why does Jim say that Mt. Flea was the first time Jim failed? Why has Jim changed?

## Writing

Ask students to write about **an experience** they have had **that changed their way of thinking about themselves or another person**.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary: Words to Watch

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**decaying**

rotting

**oracle**

prophet; someone or something able to look into the future

**encircling**

wrapping around

**overpowering**

very strong or forceful

**low profile**

calling little attention to oneself

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**skin deep**

superficial

**swear**

vow; promise; take an oath

**discreetly**

in a manner which does not call attention to a person or an action

**insulted**

treated or spoken to rudely

**highfalutin**

exaggeratedly fancy or elaborate; snobbish; stuck-up

**flaw**

a shortcoming or weakness

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**flabbergasted**

speechless; baffled

**ain't kidding**

not joking; serious (*ain't* is slang for the negative verb form *am not*, *is not*, or *are not*)

**whined**

complained in a droning, unpleasant tone of voice

**days passed like**

**a slug through**

**warm beer**

hot, humid days passed very slowly and uncomfortably

**mention**

speak of; talk about

**suspense**

a state of not knowing what will occur next

**Scrabble**

a word game played with wooden tiles on a flat board

**recliner**

a large chair having a back that can be made to lie flat

**chores**

tasks; small jobs

**in store**

waiting; laying ahead

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**cocoon**

secluded, covered place; a covering or shell in which a caterpillar transforms itself into a moth or butterfly

**extracting**

pulling out

**stream of thick,**

**pea soup heat**

humidity and heat

**leeching**

extracting; draining out

**paddle through**

**the moist air**

move through hot, humid air

**exceeded**

surpassed; went over or above

**mound**

small round hill; heap; pile

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**What in Sam Hill . . . ?**

sanitized or polite form of "What in the hell . . . ?" or "What the heck . . . ?"

**fire**

end someone's employment from a job

**old fart**

term of disrespect; to fart is to pass wind

**inflating**

growing

**overwhelmed**

awed

**transformation**

change

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary: Words to Watch *continued*

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<b>podium</b>	platform; small raised table from which a person speaks to an audience
<b>extravaganza affair</b>	large, important, festive event
<b>strutting</b>	walking proudly, often with large movements
<b>Cannonball man</b>	a man who is shot through a cannon at a circus
<b>plaid</b>	a pattern of large squares and lines, often seen in fabric made in Scotland
<b>magenta</b>	a vivid shade of deep reddish-pink
<b>perplexing</b>	confusing; difficult to understand
<b>feat</b>	act
<b>spread like smallpox</b>	moved rapidly
<b>self-assured</b>	confident
<b>reassured</b>	comforted; made secure or confident again

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<b>platform</b>	raised stage
<b>press conference</b>	a meeting for newspaper reporters
<b>grand ol'</b>	grand old; wonderful
<b>widow</b>	a married woman whose husband has died
<b>reeked</b>	smelled very strongly
<b>exhaustion</b>	complete and utter tiredness; fatigue

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<b>all liquored up</b>	drunk; inebriated
<b>decrepit</b>	run-down; old; falling apart
<b>mingle</b>	mix or interact with
<b>stupor</b>	daze
<b>for the most part</b>	mostly
<b>bash</b>	celebration; party
<b>beat the record</b>	do better at an event than at an earlier one having a particular record for time, distance, etc.
<b>crowdads</b>	edible sea animals
<b>consumed</b>	completely preoccupied with; obsessed about

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<b>appeasement</b>	quietness; contentment; calm
<b>motives</b>	reasons for doing something
<b>gained</b>	won; earned
<b>battle against the odds</b>	do something which is improbable, difficult, or thought to be impossible

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Comprehension Check for "Prophets"

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

1. Jim and Pud have been friends
  - a. since they were small children
  - b. since the previous summer
  - c. for a very long time
  - d. a and c
2. Pud is
  - a. the narrator
  - b. Jim's little brother
  - c. a small pet in the town
  - d. the narrator's cousin
3. Jim has planned a big surprise for
  - a. Christmas
  - b. New Year's Day
  - c. the Fourth of July
  - d. Boxing Day
4. Jim gives Pud a malt for free and is unconcerned about losing his job in the malt shop because
  - a. he has a new job
  - b. he's convinced he will be famous after July 4th
  - c. he doesn't like his boss
  - d. b and c
5. Jim announces to the town that he plans to
  - a. fly through the air from a cannon
  - b. dig a tunnel through Mt. Flea
  - c. fly to the moon
  - d. build a mountain
6. Jim works for a very long time and finally
  - a. gives up and goes home
  - b. dies from exhaustion
  - c. completes his task and digs through the other side
  - d. asks for assistance from other people

## Writing: Tone and Voice

The narrator of "Prophets" writes in a conversational manner. The reader has the feeling that the narrator is speaking directly to someone he knows well.

Write a brief account of an experience you had with a friend one day in recent months. **Imagine that you are writing to a very good friend.** Use a separate sheet of paper.

- What happened?
- Who was there?
- What were you doing?
- Where were you?
- What was the weather like?
- What was surprising, funny, interesting, or unusual?
- What, if anything, did you learn from the experience?

After you've written your account, imagine that the event you described took place during school hours when you were supposed to be in class. Rewrite the event, but this time **write it as a report to your principal** who has asked you why you were not in school on that day. Will you change your writing in any way? How? Why? Have fun with this assignment—get as imaginative as you like!

