

# Roadkill

## Grades

6+

## Author

Lainnie Capouya

## Illustrator

Allison Strauss



## Author Bio

Lainnie Capouya is the mother of two teenagers. She grew up on a plantation in Central Louisiana. Having the opportunity to rear them in Southern California, they inspire her to write about her childhood in rural Louisiana in the 1960s. Her novel *Road Kill* is a work in progress. She earned her B.S. in Early Childhood Education at Louisiana State University.

## Illustrator Bio

Allison Strauss grew up among writers, and is particularly fond of projects that meld poetry and prose with visual art. Allison thanks the Ryman Arts Foundation, Ragan Art Academy, The Armory Center for the Arts, Peter Fetterman Gallery and the Pasadena Waldorf School for nourishing her as a young artist. She went on to earn her degree in art from Colorado College where she drew cartoons for the school paper. Since returning to her native Los Angeles, Allison has enjoyed seasonal positions with Hill Nadell Literary Agency, *The Los Angeles Review Of Books*, *Slake* and Vroman's Bookstore. She's usually carrying either a sketchbook or a novel. Her work can be viewed at <http://allisonstraussart.com>.

## Summary

Three siblings, including one who has become disabled, bond with each other as they find entertainment on a hot day in the countryside by playing a dangerous game with a dead armadillo that they found.

## Common Core Anchor Standards Addressed

### Writing Anchor Standards-Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

### Research for Building and Presenting Knowledge

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

## READING Standards

### Key Ideas and Details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text
- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

### Craft and Structure

- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

- Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

## Academic Vocabulary to Explore

*(See vocabulary approach in Appendix A of CCSS.)*

### Tier Two

Grimaced  
Slipknot  
Ambitious  
Levee  
Notorious  
Monotony  
Bolls  
Tumultuous  
Armadillo  
Poised  
Bailing twine  
Careened  
Carcass  
Tethered  
Encapsulated  
Cutgrass  
Cattails  
Frigid  
Forlorn  
Composure  
Ruckus

## Complementary Essay to Introduce AFTER Reading the Text

**Essay:** *Advice to Youth*, by Mark Twain (1882).

## Warm-up Questions

*(To introduce the story, should be used as a quick write or a journal/reflection piece.)*

1. Who are your comrades? Your friends or siblings who are your fellow conspirators in life, who see you through thick and thin—through mischief making and taking the consequences? Who have been a part of your childhood and you'll remember your experiences together for life?
2. Was there a time as a child when you acted with poor judgement? When you did something that you'd never do now that you've grown more mature? How did it feel then? How do you look back on it?

## Main Idea for Study

Though the children were participating in a dangerous, thoughtless game, their activities brought them together in unexpected ways.

## Possible Themes for Study

- Understanding the uniqueness of family.
- Childhood folly, and the deep bonds it can create.
- How good it can feel to be bad.
- Memories can be bitter and sweet simultaneously.
- Thinking before you act.

## Focus Questions

1. Do you think the children's father was really angry with them at the end? Why or why not?
2. Why did the children decide to play their grisly game with the armadillo? Why not do something less dangerous?
3. How do you think the narrator views her actions with the armadillo now that she's grown-up? Why tell us this story?

*(The focus questions can be used for a Socratic Seminar and/or a writing assignment.)*

## Comprehension Questions

1. How did the children find the armadillo?
2. Where do the children live?
3. How does the family support itself? How are the children expected to help earn money?
4. What had happened to Alice?
5. How did the children rig the armadillo to trick passing drivers?
6. Who is Pete and what does he look like?
7. How does the armadillo lose its head? What does the narrator do with the head?

## Text-dependent Questions

These questions may be used for Response to Literature writing pieces. They should not be used as comprehension questions.

1. Using examples from the text, explain how the children in “Roadkill’s” method of entertaining themselves was problematic. Why?
2. Does the fact that the armadillo is already dead make the children’s actions more acceptable?
3. After reading the following passage, what clues do you have as to the deeper meaning of the story? Explain your thoughts.

*“We both looked at her. Our little sister could be more irritating than a hangnail. Her hair had just begun to grow back. It was now an inch long, and stood up like a flat top, but we would never be so cruel as to remind her of that. Not after all she had been through. Since her surgery, she still spoke with a pinched nasally tone. She couldn’t yet sound out her ‘D’s. After eight months, she managed to leave the hospital alive. Momma and Daddy stuck it out by her side and brought her home. The only thing she had to part with was her hair, half her cerebellum and the hearing in her left ear. Her malignant tumor had been merciful.”*

4. How does the father know what the children have done without actually witnessing it? Is this a close-knit family?

## Types of Writing – Exercises & Activities

### Narrative

1. Do you have brothers or sisters? Cousins? Close friends who you grew-up with? Write a short story about a time you did something together with these relatives or friends that, though looking back

you know you shouldn't have done it then and wouldn't do it now, you'll still hold it as a treasured experience that brought you together.

2. Rewrite the story from the perspective of the deceased armadillo.
3. Rewrite one of the near car accidents from the perspective of the motorist.
4. Rewrite a portion of the story from the perspective of the sister.

## Descriptive

Using details from the story, research on armadillos and your imagination, write a detailed description of the dead armadillo. Incorporate each of your senses—sound, touch, smell, sight—and taste!

**Note:** Of course you should never actually eat roadkill.

## Expository/Analytic

1. Read Mark Twain's essay, *Advice to Youth*. What is Mark Twain's overall message in this essay? How does it apply and not apply to the children in *Roadkill*?
2. Did the children go too far in creating a dangerous situation for drivers? When is a game or a prank just fun and when is it going too far?
3. What do you think the brothers' relationship with their sister was like before the roadkill incident? How did her disability affect their relationship? Do you think their relationship changed after the incident?

## Possible Instructional Approaches

### Activity

In groups, design games—that don't endanger anyone—that you can then do together as a group. You can design a board game, an obstacle course, a role playing game, etc. Each game must have a clear goal, clear roles for each member of the team, and a clear way to achieve the goal of the game or win it. Build your games, present them to your class and play them!

If possible, collaborate with art and science teachers on components of the games.

When you are done, write an essay about the experience of collaborating to build and play the game!

## Field Trip

1. Take a trip to your local Natural History Museum. Learn about the animals native to your area—both urban and surrounding rural and mountain areas. Arrange ahead of time to have a museum specialist meet with the class and teach them how animals are preserved—how do museum scientists with special licenses collect and use roadkill for scientific purposes (such as paleontology)? Make sure they also explain why folks can't normally just pick up roadkill.

Have students write about what they learned.

2. Take a trip to a local wildlife sanctuary for rescued animals. Learn about the situations from which these animals are rescued and how they are cared for.

Have students write about their experience.