

# The Thing on Treufel’s Arm

## Grades

9+

## Author

Andrew Nicholls

## Illustrator

Allison Strauss



## Author Bio

Andrew Nicholls grew up in England and Canada. With his longtime writing partner Darrell Vickers he has written for performers including Mickey Rooney, George Carlin, Rodney Dangerfield and Johnny Carson. Since 1976, he has created or staffed over 100 TV shows and pilots, including two dozen animated series in the U.S. and abroad. Nicholls’ fiction and humor has appeared in *Black Clock*, *McSweeney’s* online, *The Los Angeles Review Of Books*, *Kugelmass* and *The Santa Monica Review*.

## 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

Cameron, a young man, witnesses his sister's boyfriend, Treufel's encounter with a crab during a family vacation. The story unfolds at the family's lake cottage in front of the following characters: Cameron, Eric Treufel, Beck, Janie, Anastasia and mom. Treufel has a crab hanging around his wrist. Instead of removing it, he prods it and parades with it as a badge or tool for bully. The family is torn by these events, but when Treufel is forced to stop, the family comes together in the process.

## **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**

- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- 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.

### **Craft and Structure**

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

### **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- 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

Lark  
Voracious  
Deterioration  
Extremities  
Waft  
Sprawled  
Pincers  
Delinquent  
Inaugural  
Forlorn  
Sect  
Grudging  
Fabled  
Unsavory  
Stolidly  
Trudged  
Shucking

## Complementary Short Story to Introduce AFTER Reading the Text

**Short Story:** *The Veldt*, by Ray Bradbury.

### Warm-up Questions

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

1. Tell the story of a recent family trip or vacation: Where did you go? Who was there?

2. Do you have any fun stories to share? Was there any family conflict? How was it resolved (or not)?

## Main Idea for Study

The most unlikely situations can reveal our character and strengthen—or weaken—our relationships.

## Possible Themes for Study

- Growing up and coming of age (can be comical and messy).
- Learning to respect is an essential skill in life.
- Love is what keeps a family together.
- Even the seemingly strongest person has his or her weaknesses.
- Ethical treatment of other creatures.

## Focus Questions

1. Trips and vacations can be incubators for family conflicts. Discuss why conflicts tend to happen and intensify and true characters show when people are supposed to be enjoying each other's company and relaxing.
2. Adolescence can be a tough stage of life. Teenagers rebel in various ways, and in the meantime, show vulnerability differently. Discuss how Janie and Eric Treufel, who are from distinct families, each deal with adolescence in their own terms and what drives their differences.
3. A daughter's coming-of-age is not just an event for the teenager herself. It affects the mother and usually opens up another chapter in her life, as well. Discuss the interwoven story of mom (the unwilling departure with her own past, her marriage, buying the cottage and her managing a household) draws parallels with Janie's story and discuss how the mom's encounter with Treufel has shaped her parenting and her relationship with Janie.
4. The German for "devil" is "Teufel" (TOY-full). Do you think this is a coincidence?

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

## Comprehension Questions

1. How are Cameron, Eric Treufel, Beck, Janie, and Anastasia related? Who was the youngest of them all?
2. What is Treufel's nickname for his girlfriend's older brother, our narrator, Cameron? Why do you think he chose that name?

3. How did Eric Treufel and Janie meet?
4. How did mom feel when she was alone managing a full household without the father at the lake cottage?
5. What's Eric Treufel's personality? Why wouldn't he let go of the crab? What is he trying to prove or achieve?
6. What role did Cameron play when the whole drama of the crab unfolded?
7. At what moment did the crab fall off of Treufel's arm? How did it happen?
8. Why didn't Treufel want to see a biology teacher as suggested by Mr. Seaton?
9. How did Cameron and Beck treat Anastasia and why?
10. What became of the crab at the end of the story? Why did Treufel act as he did?
11. Was the conflict between Treufel and the rest of the family resolved at the end of the story? Why or why not?

## Text-dependent Questions

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

1. What was mom's biggest challenge managing a house full of teenage children in a cottage? Where did she draw a line between "hospitality" and "enforcement of household rules"?
2. How did Janie appear in front of Cameron? What did Cameron think of Janie, seeing and hearing her coming-of-age? During the crab drama, did his attitude towards Treufel change at all? Why or why not?
3. When Janie proposed playing Scrabble, the author mentioned the father's advice about stepping around brown bears. Why the analogy here?
4. Why did Treufel, the tough kid through and through, have a meltdown at mom's mention of his brothers (as scum)?
5. Describe how Treufel treated the crab. How did it make you feel? How do you think the crab might have felt?
6. At the end of the story, why did everybody laugh upon Beck's comment? ("So! Only two more of these and you'll be getting married I guess!") What was so funny about it?

## Types of Writing – Exercises & Activities

### Narrative

1. Write a portion of the story from Anastasia's point of view. What was her reaction and thinking when Treufel was parading around the cottage with the crab on his arm? What about when Treufel insulted the mom and dragged her across the room? Or, write the scene (in greater detail) where Anastasia was in the car with mom, Janie, Cameron and Beck, trying to find Treufel and get him into the car. Expand and dramatize the conflict in that happened in that compact space.
2. Write a portion of the story from the crab's point of view. Consider the crab's perspective of events, how it might have seen the other characters in the story, and how it felt.

### Descriptive

Write a paragraph describing fishing on the lake from *The Thing On Treufel's Arm* alone or with family in a third-person voice using details from the story.

### Expository/Analytic

1. Has your relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend changed your relationship with your parents? How has it affected your own growth? (If no boyfriend/girlfriend) What are some of your significant relationships outside of your family and what are their impact on you?
2. Have you ever encountered a bully like Treufel in your life? Explain their motives and different aspects of their personalities.
3. How is the relationship of the children and their parents in Ray Bradbury's *The Veldt* alike or different to the relationship of the mom and the children in *The Thing on Treufel's Arm*?

## Additional Reading & Writing Exercises

1. Research the religious group called **Doukhobor**: its history, beliefs, traditions, and migration. Write a short fictional story based on two people, one from the Doukhobor group and the other from a another religious group (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, etc.), their dynamics and interactions.
2. Find out if there's actually a type of crab that barks. Write a descriptive paragraph about this specific type of crab.
3. Research Andrew Wyeth and his artistic style. Write a short story based on Andrew Wyeth or one of his paintings.

## Possible Instructional Approaches

### Activity

Create a collage of photos from a family event or trip. Write a description to accompany the collage that tells about the relationships between the people in the collage and the dynamics of their different personalities when they interact. Present and tell about your collage in class. (As an alternative, have students bring the photos to class and do the project at school instead of outside of school.)

**Students need:** Printed photos, scissors, paper, glue, notebook, and pen or pencil.

### Field Trip

1. Take a class trip to a local aquarium (such as the Long Beach Aquarium or the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium). Bring a sketchbook and sketch pictures of crabs that you see in the aquarium. Write a one paragraph description of each crab to accompany the sketches.

**Students need:** Sketchbooks or notebooks. Pencils for sketching and writing.

2. Take a class trip to the nearest ocean tide pools at the lowest point of the tide (check tide charts / timetables). Find and observe crabs in the tidepools. Have students take notes about the behavior of the crabs, what they look like, etc. Afterwards, have students research the species of crabs that they observed. Using their notes and research, students should write a short story from the perspective of a crab living in the tidepools.

**Students need:** Notebooks.