



READERS' GUIDE:

Teddy Mars Almost a World Record Breaker

by Molly B. Burnham

Guide By Christine Paglia Baker

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Take at least 30 seconds to look carefully at all the details of the cover illustration, front and back. Don't read yet! What details do you notice immediately? What do you notice after looking more closely?
2. Can you find three different ways that stars are part of the cover? Make a prediction about how stars will be important to the story.
3. The three pigeons on the cover may seem surprising. Make a prediction about why they are important to the story.
4. Look closely at the boy's face (you might infer that this is Teddy). Choose at least 3 adjectives from the table below that you think describe him. You can also brainstorm your own adjective(s). For each one, write a detail you see as evidence. (One is done for you).

Adjectives: proud unsure excited nervous strong strange hardworking typical friendly scrawny compassionate	
Adjective Example: <i>friendly</i>	Evidence from illustration Example: <i>He is Smiling</i>

5. Read Teddy's Tips on the back cover of the book. What clues or questions does this list give you about Teddy's life?





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Reading Discussion Questions

1. The book begins by introducing Teddy's brother Jake, and mentioning The Guinness Book of World Records. Make a prediction about how Jake and the Guinness Book will be important to the story.
2. Teddy's teacher, Ms. Raffeli says, "You'd think after having five of the Mars kids, they'd give me a break." (page 3) From what we know about Teddy so far, why do you think she would say this?
3. Viva is a new kid in Teddy's class. Why do you think the author, Molly B. Burnham, decided to include a new student in a story that's about Teddy?
4. On page 26, Viva says, "Your life is really different from mine. I'm an only child. Every single thing I do is watched, noticed, commented on, and discussed. It's like living under a microscope."

Compare and contrast Teddy's and Viva's families using the diagram below—or draw your own. Keep adding to it as you continue to read. An example is done to get you started.

Teddy's Family	Viva's Family	Both Families
7 kids	1 kid	Have kids





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5. There are 10 of Teddy's attempts to break world records that are described in this book. Use the chart below to keep track of them as you read.

Record Attempt	Similarities I notice
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

6. On page 53, Lonnie says to Teddy, "Man, you have the life....Your parents are so outnumbered they give up." Do you agree with Lonnie? Why or why not?

7. Once Teddy moves into the tent in October, the ways people interact with him change. Rank each interaction in the grid below with a + (good change), - (bad change) or / (neutral change).

Teddy's dad comes out to chat with him and eat oreos in the tent (page 58). Ranking: _____	Grumpy Pigeon Man starts talking to Teddy and calling him "Tent Boy" (page 60). Ranking: _____	Grace takes pictures of Teddy to prove what a "nut-o" he is for living in a tent (page 73). Ranking: _____
Mr. Marney teaches Teddy pigeon vocabulary: aviary, nesting boxes, and loft (pages 60-61)	Teddy finds out that Grumpy Pigeon Man's real name is Mr. Marney (page 67). Ranking: _____	Teddy gets a job helping to care for the pigeons (page 65). Ranking: _____





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8. By December, Teddy realizes that he'll need determination to continue sleeping in the tent in winter. Make a prediction: will he keep doing it? Give 2-3 reasons from the story to back up your prediction.
9. Choose 2 adjectives to describe how you think Grumpy Pigeon Man feels about Teddy? How can you tell?
10. On page 123, Teddy compares an old cracker from The Guinness Book of World Records to Mr. Marney. He also starts calling him Mr. Marney instead of Grumpy Pigeon Man. What do you think the cracker and Mr. Marney have in common?
11. By December, three major characters have nicknames in the book:

Character	Nickname
Teddy	Tent Boy
Jake	The Destructor
Mr. Marney	Grumpy Pigeon Man

Why do you think the author, Molly B. Burnham, made all three of these characters use nicknames instead of their real names? Do the nicknames seem fun, silly, honest, respectful, or something else?





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12. Check out the table below listing the holidays Ms. Raffelli discusses with the class in December (described on page 131).

- Make a check next to the ones you've already heard about
- Make a star next to the ones you and your family celebrate
- Make a question mark next to the ones you could learn more about

Holiday	Associated group	Heard of it	Celebrate it	Could learn more
Hanukkah	Jews			
Christmas	Christians			
Kwanzaa	African Americans			
Bodhi	Buddhists			
Yule	Pagans			
Eid al-Adha	Muslims			
Diwali	Hindus			

13. Why do you think Mr. Marney won't go see his pigeons after he gets home from the hospital (pages.135-136)? Use evidence from the story to back up your idea.





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14. On pages 138-144, Teddy is trying to see his family's Christmas traditions through Vivia's eyes, since her family has joined his family for the first time.
 - a. What would you think about Teddy's family traditions compared to the ways your family celebrates holidays together?
 - b. Does your family have traditions that might seem unusual to someone who joined you for the first time, like Viva and her family? Write a short description of one of your family traditions from the perspective of a newcomer to your home.

15. On page 147, Teddy compares Mr. Marney to Lonesome George, the last tortoise of his species. Earlier in the book, he compared Mr. Marney to a cracker.
 - a. Think about these comparisons. Do Lonesome George and the cracker have anything in common?
 - b. How does Teddy feel about Mr. Marney?
 - c. Make a prediction about what might change about Mr. Marney and his pigeons.

16. The Mars family goes bowling to celebrate Teddy's dad's birthday in February (pages 161-162). Molly B. Burnham describes what happens from Teddy's point of view. Try rewriting the bowling alley scene from Jake's point of view. Think about what he wants, what's exciting and fun for him, and how he experiences the bowling alley.





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17. After the skunk incident, Teddy finally gets a record-breaking idea that relates to his own life, not just to records that are already in the book.
 - a. What is his idea?
 - b. Do you think he'll do it? Make a prediction based on what you know about Teddy and what you know about storytelling.
 - c. Do you think Jake will ruin this too?

18. On page 215, Teddy says: "Poor Destructor, he will never be normal. I guess it just doesn't run in our family. But maybe normal is not all it's cracked up to be."
 - a. Do you agree or disagree with Teddy's statement?
 - b. Has Teddy changed from the beginning of the book? How?

19. Look back at what you predicted about Teddy based on the cover illustration before reading the book. Now think about what you know about Teddy. How does the picture look now? Do the details mean something different to you after getting to know Teddy?

ANSWER KEY Reading Discussion Question 5:

Record attempts	Similarities I notice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stuffing grapes in his mouth• Doing jumping jacks• Skateboarding down the banister• Dragging a chair with his teeth• Raking the biggest leaf pile• Cracking eggs on his head• Pushing an orange with his nose• Stretching rubber bands over his face• Tallest snow mound• Most pigeons to land on a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of food (grapes, eggs, orange)• Using his body in unusual ways (#1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10)• Biggest piles (5, 9)• Trying to break records that are already in Guinness (all but 10)• Doing things that are physically challenging• Many attempts use materials that are easily available to a typical kid (even though Teddy is not typical).

