

Directions

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Read this article. Then answer questions 1 through 7.

The Great Pumpkin

by Brendan Borrell

The Patch

Quinn Werner's backyard pumpkin patch overlooks a wooded creek. In the winter, when the maples and oaks stand like toothpicks and snow coats the western Pennsylvania valley, Werner gazes out his kitchen window and caresses his prizewinning seeds. The topsoil is frozen solid, and his orange tractor sits unused in the garage. He is not a big talker, but every Thursday his buddy Dave Stelts phones him, and their conversation always comes back to springtime—to the pumpkin patch and the weigh-off.

In April, Werner germinates his seeds, each one as long as a quarter, by soaking them in a mix of hydrogen peroxide and water. He pots them and incubates them in a cooler with heating pads.

He then places the seedlings under fluorescent lights upstairs in what he calls his pumpkin room. On nice days, he takes the little pots outside for an hour or two for fresh air and natural sunlight. In May, every seedling is planted in the patch under its own clear plastic tent fitted with incandescent bulbs that are switched on during chilly nights.

Within weeks, the vines stretch out from underneath the plastic like octopus arms. In June, when the first golden trumpets of female flowers begin to open, Werner pollinates them by brushing them with pollen-covered stamens from select male flowers. Then he covers them with plastic cups to prevent honeybees from meddling.

When I visited Werner's property on a sweltering summer afternoon, he was checking his patch for the third time that day. Werner straddled the orange mesh fence that surrounds his garden and waded through a sea of stiff, broad leaves toward a thigh-high dome covered by an old bedsheet.

His 12 pumpkins had been growing for less than a month, so I had expected that one would be small enough to hoist into the back seat of a car. Werner whipped off the sheet, and there sat a shiny pale pumpkin (they turn orange later in the year) that seemed to sag on one side like a mound of Silly Putty left out in the sun. Based on its circumference, he guessed it was pushing 400 pounds (180 kilograms). And the season had just begun.

Werner beamed. "It's real long and real wide," he said. "It's in really good shape."

But as he leaned in closer, running his hand along a smooth ridge, his face grew taut. "Oh, man, as a matter of fact, it's split."

30 Tucked into the blossom end of the pumpkin was a tiny crack. Even if the crack wasn't enough to disqualify the fruit from competition (and it was), it could widen and let in bacteria that would quickly rot the pumpkin from the inside. "That makes me sick," he said. "This is the reason why I grow so many."

35 Werner and his pal Dave Stelts are competitive gardeners who vie for bragging rights and prize money ranging from a few hundred to thousands of dollars. Their crop of choice is the Atlantic Giant Pumpkin, a freak of nature and intensive breeding. During peak growing season, these pumpkins can gain 50 pounds (23 kg) per day—which is sometimes too much. The cracked pumpkin Werner showed me had swollen too quickly after a hard rain.

40 In general he has kept about two-thirds of his colossal gourds intact. In 2008, he earned the title of "grower of the year" after trucking pumpkins to six weigh-offs and winning five. His pumpkins had an average weight of nearly 1,500 pounds (680 kg). "I lost by two pounds in the sixth," he says.

45 Since the 1980s, giant pumpkins have tripled in size, thanks to strategic breeding and hardcore growers with time on their hands and dirt under their fingernails. (From April to October, Werner spends six to eight hours per day tending his garden.) Thomas Andres, a squash expert who works at the New York Botanical Garden, has predicted that the first pumpkin weighing one ton (2,000 pounds, or 900 kg) will appear in 2014.

50 The Ohio Valley contest, Werner's local weigh-off, is one of the more than 80 competitions in the "Great Pumpkin Belt," an area that stretches across North America from Washington State to Nova Scotia. This is prime pumpkin territory. The region has 90 to 120 frost-free summer days, but is cold enough in winter to keep plant diseases and pests in check. The weigh-offs are friendly competitions, but they're also
55 a form of at-home science. Growers meticulously graph their pumpkins' growth curves and share successes and failures—and seeds—with their peers.

60 "By God, if we can get a pumpkin up to a ton, imagine what we can do with somebody's vegetable crop," says Stelts, president of the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth.
65 "What we are doing will be reflected on the dinner table of America."



At a pumpkin contest in Rhode Island, a pumpkin is transported for weighing.

The Great Pumpkin Questions

1. Which idea is introduced in lines 1 through 6?

- A Werner is focused on his hobby throughout the year.
- B Werner believes that cooperation is the key to success.
- C Werner's seeds are sought after by other growers.
- D Werner's location has contributed to his success

2. Read this sentence from lines 16 and 17.

Then he covers them with plastic cups to prevent honeybees from meddling.
The author uses the word "meddling" in line 17 to suggest that honeybees

- A are sensitive to cooler temperatures
- B will cause problems in the garden
- C will leave the garden quickly
- D are attracted to light sources

3. The photograph in the article is **most** closely related to

- A lines 27 through 29
- B lines 30 through 33
- C lines 34 through 39
- D lines 40 through 43

4. How do lines 44 through 48 reflect a central idea of the article?

- A by explaining some of the challenges faced by pumpkin growers
- B by explaining why pumpkin growers have the time to breed pumpkins
- C by connecting the efforts of pumpkin growers to the size of giant pumpkins
- D by showing the recognition that successful pumpkin growers get for their efforts

5. Which evidence from the article suggests that Werner's hobby is popular?

- A Giant pumpkins have tripled in size since the 1980s.
- B Competitions can earn gardeners thousands of dollars.
- C Experts predict that a one-ton pumpkin will be grown soon.
- D There are more than 80 competitions held in a particular area

6. Lines 53 through 66 generate interest in the topic of great pumpkin growing by

- A** providing detailed descriptions of the weigh-offs
- B** describing challenges that growers must overcome
- C** mentioning that people can achieve similar results themselves
- D** suggesting that consumers can benefit from these friendly competitions

7. Which statement would be **most** important to include in a summary of the article?

- A** Growing giant pumpkins requires a combination of time and skill.
- B** Giant pumpkins grow best in regions that have changing seasons.
- C** Giant pumpkin weigh-offs generally take place in the spring.
- D** Growing giant pumpkins requires a background in science.

Directions

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Read this story. Then answer questions 8 through 14.

Allegra Shapiro is twelve years old and lives in Portland, Oregon. She is waiting for her turn to compete in the Bloch Competition where she will be playing music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), a famous classical composer. In order to play well and to focus both before and during her performance, Allegra pictures images in her mind. Often she imagines her beloved great-grandmother, Elter Bubbe Leah.

Excerpt from *The Mozart Season*

by Virginia Euwer Wolff

As I looked at the keyboard of the piano, my mind tried to empty itself; it tried to pour all my thoughts down a chute of some kind. I could feel them sliding away. Like a big balloon deflating, like a tank of something emptying. I felt my eyes bug out with the shock of it, and I saw my arms reach out to catch what was emptying out of me. I stood
5 there looking at the space between my arms, and tried to find Mozart. I closed my eyes and looked for the first movement first; there it was, with its cadenza.¹ Second movement. Third. They were there, with their notes in order, with Mr. Kaplan's blue markings on the pages.

Very strange, my mind doing that. I picked up my violin and played the third-
10 movement cadenza. It was there, solid, it hadn't gone off anywhere. I wrapped Elter Bubbe Leah's purse in its tissue paper and put it back in my violin case. I went down the hallway to the bathroom. I looked at myself in the mirror. I was just a person in a blue dress standing in dim light in a public bathroom next to a towel machine. I turned around and went back to room 104 and sat down with my violin and bow in my hand.

The envelope woman came and got me, and we walked down the hall and then down
15 the stairs and then through a heavy door. Suddenly the lights were very bright and the floor was very polished and there was a line of screens on my right.² Several screens were lined up so the jury couldn't see any part of me, even my feet. The woman pointed to where I was supposed to stand. I went to the spot and stood. It was the place Steve
20 Landauer, Number Three, had just walked away from. I suddenly remembered Alice in Wonderland getting smaller and smaller. I propped myself firmly on my feet, looked down at them; they were the same size they'd been five minutes before, and I knew I wasn't shrinking.

I decided to look at the vertical line down one of the screens.

¹ **cadenza:** a solo inserted into a movement (or section of music), typically near the end

25 A man's voice came from the other side of the screens: "Number Four, you may begin when you're ready."

I thumbed my strings and heard the D string a shade flat. While I was tuning it I closed my eyes and saw Elter Bubbe Leah's photograph with the purse and the goose and the broom, and into my vision came a teenage hand with a quill pen in it, just at the edge
30 of the photograph. Music being written. I listened in my mind for the rhythm and I took a medium-size breath and started.

The start was a good one; notes came up out of the violin on time, in time, things weren't blurred, it was fun. Through the notes, I saw Elter Bubbe Leah shooing her geese up a slope with her broom in Poland; the notes went scooting along. It was strange: I was
35 able to hear every note clearly, every group of sixteenth-notes, every little sforzando,² and at the same time I was seeing a movie of pastures and the little house in Suprasl.

The second movement. How many times Heavenly and I'd gone to sleep listening to it, with our arms around each other. I reached inside my body for the key change and the rhythm change and I felt for the gentleness of it. I saw Leah, a little girl in a long white
40 nightgown, climbing into her bed by candlelight, and I took a medium-size breath and played. The notes sounded like little flickerings of flame from the candle, little bright lights floating in a dark room. I played it for her to drop off to sleep in her feather bed with her braids spread out on the pillow.

The third movement, the Rondeau.³ If you turn on the radio just in time to hear this
45 movement, you think it's such a happy thing, those alternating sections, dances. And yet, when you pay close attention, there's a kind of fragile sound—as if something's going to break somewhere but you don't know where. And little silences come up between the sections. I looked into what was going on in my mind and I saw the early morning waking Leah up with the sun coming in, a blessing. I took a medium-size breath and began. She
50 woke up in the sunshine and she was a real girl in a real house, and I could see the grass and flowers growing as she walked outside, and I could feel the solid ground under her feet, and during the cadenza she was scampering along, very happy. And I got so carried away with the little girl in the story in my mind that I played an E-sharp a little bit askew, my finger came down on it too sideways. But I was happy. I was happy with the sounds of
55 Mozart coming up out of the wood; and as I moved toward the ending it felt right. The last three notes came out just the way I liked them, balanced, even, each one of them getting softer until the last one just skips away into the air.

I took my violin down off my shoulder. I was in Portland, Oregon, and I'd just finished doing what I'd promised and feared to do. I was twelve years old, standing with
60 my two feet on the floor and my arms hanging down. I might never even tell anybody

² **sforzando**: a strong, sudden accent on a note or chord

³ **Rondeau**: a medieval French song

about Leah and her goose and her feather bed in my mind. A whole story of her had happened inside the music. I looked down at the scroll⁴ of my violin. It's like a seashell, as if there's such a story inside that you could never find out all of it.

A man's voice came from the other side of the screen. "Thank you, Number Four."

⁴ scroll: the wooden handle of a violin appears rolled up like a paper scroll

The Mozart Season Questions

8. Lines 1 through 8 contribute to the reader's understanding of the story by

- A allowing the reader to immediately understand Allegra's state of mind
- B sharing with the reader the frustration Allegra feels before the performance
- C emphasizing how important it is for Allegra to empty her mind of all thoughts
- D suggesting that Allegra's surroundings are less important than her feelings

9. Why does Allegra think of Alice in Wonderland in lines 20 through 23?

- A The size of the room makes her feel extremely small.
- B She is so nervous that she feels as if she might be shrinking.
- C She feels uncomfortable with the jury behind the line of screens.
- D The boy before her makes her feel unsure because of his skillful playing.

10. Based on lines 27 through 31, which statement **best** explains how the photograph helps Allegra?

- A It inspires a vision that prepares her for performing the music.
- B It reminds her that her great-grandmother was a teenage musician like her.
- C It provides a memory that creates a mood of disappointment.
- D It prompts her to recall a pleasant time composing music with her great-grandmother.

11. In line 41, the narrator compares the musical notes to "flickerings of flame from the candle" to show that the sounds are

- A strong and powerful
- B gentle and delicate
- C quick and changeable
- D sad and brief

12. The author's repetition of Allegra taking "a medium-size breath" in lines 30 through 31, 40, and 49 helps to create a feeling of

- A agitation before performing
- B release in finally performing
- C controlled focus during her performance

D patience in persisting through her performance

1.3. Read these sentences from lines 62 and 63.

I looked down at the scroll of my violin. It's like a seashell, as if there's such a story inside that you could never find out all of it.

The simile suggests that Allegra

A appreciates her violin as full of possibility for the music she creates with it

B wishes she could unleash the secrets her violin hides from her

C relies on her violin for inspiration during performances

D respects her violin's beauty and craftsmanship

14. What is the theme of the story? Use two details from the text to support your response.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or printed text on the paper.

