

All questions must be answered in complete sentences and in your own words unless otherwise indicated.

All answers must be based on information in the passage.

Special attention should be given to the directions for each question.

The Secret to Success!

"Benjamin, is this your report card?" my mother asked as she picked up the folded white card from the table.

"Uh, yeah," I said, trying to sound casual. Too ashamed to hand it to her, I had dropped it on the table, hoping that she wouldn't notice until after I went to bed.

I had been in the fifth grade not even two weeks before everyone considered me the dumbest kid in the class and frequently made jokes about me. Before long I too began to feel as though I really was the most stupid kid in fifth grade. Despite Mother's frequently saying, "You're smart, Bennie. You can do anything you want to do," I did not believe her.

No one else in school thought I was smart either.

While mother slowly read my report card, I hurried into my room and started to get ready for bed. A few minutes later, Mother came into my bedroom.

"Benjamin," she said, "are these your grades?" She held the card in front of me as if I hadn't seen it before.

"Oh, yeah, but you know, it doesn't mean much."

"No, that's not true, Bennie. It means a lot."

"Just a report card."

"But it's more than that. Education is the only way you're ever going to escape poverty," she said. "It's the only way you're ever going to get ahead in life and be successful. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, mother," I mumbled.

"If you keep on getting these kinds of grades, you're going to spend the rest of your life begging, or at best sweeping floors in a factory. That's not the kind of life that I want for you."

I hung my head genuinely ashamed. My mother had been raising my older brother, Curtis and me by herself. Having only a third-grade education herself, she knew the value of what she did not have. Daily she **drummed** into Curtis and me that we had to do our best in school.

Two evenings after the incident with the report card, mother came home about an hour before bedtime. Curtis and I were sprawled out, watching TV. She walked across the room, snapped off the set, and faced both of us. "Boys," she said, "you're wasting

too much of your time in front of that television. You don't get an education from staring at television all the time."

Before either of us could make a protest, she told us that she had been praying for wisdom. "The Lord's told me what to do," she said. "So from now on, you will not watch television, except for two **preselected** programs each week, and only after you've done your homework. Furthermore, you don't play outside after school, either until you've done your homework."

"Everyone else plays outside right after school," I said, unable to think of anything except how bad it would be if I couldn't play with my friends. "I won't have any friends if I stay in the house all the time."

"That may be," mother said, "but everybody else is not going to be as successful as you are."

"But mother -"

"This is what we're going to do. I asked God for wisdom, and this is the answer I got."

"In addition," she said, "to doing your homework, you have to read two books from the library each week. Every single week."

"Two books? Two?" Even though I was in fifth grade, I had never read a whole book in my life.

"Yes, two. When you finish reading them, you must write me a book report just like you do at school. You're not living up to your potential, so I'm going to see that you do."

The following day was Thursday. After school, Curtis and I walked to the local branch of the library. We both wandered around a little, not having an idea about how to select books or which books we wanted to check out.

The librarian came over to us and asked if she could help. I explained that both of us wanted to check out two books. After asking us what kind of books we should like to read, she led us to a section of books and left us to make our selection. I **flipped through** the row of books until I found two that looked easy enough for me to read. One of them, *Chip, the Dam Builder* - about a beaver- was the first one I had ever checked out. As soon as I got home, I started to read. For the first time, I read a book all the way through even though it took me two nights. Reluctantly, I admitted afterward to mother that I really had liked reading about Chip.

Two things happened in the second half of fifth grade that convinced me of the importance of reading books. Our teacher, Mrs. Williamson, had a spelling bee and I was able to spell the word "agriculture". That gave me hope. The following week Mr. Jaeck, the Science teacher, was teaching us about volcanoes, and he held up an object that looked like a piece of black glass-like rock and asked if anyone knew what it was. I was the only one to raise my hand and my answer was correct. I couldn't have been more pleased and excited. That day, for the first time, I realized that mother had

been right. Reading is the way out of ignorance, and the road to achievement. I did not have to be the class dummy any more.

From then on, my grades improved in every subject. In a year and a half, I had moved to the top of the class. Over the years I continued to do well. I realized if I was going to achieve goals, I was going to have to work for them. Today, I am a graduate of Yale University and the University of Michigan Medical School. Presently, I am director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

So many times while growing up I remembered my mother saying, "Bennie, you can be anything you want." All of the lessons my mother taught me I can combine into this maxim: *Always give your best*. Through reading and giving my best, I am where I am today.

***Adapted from "Think Big"1992
by Ben Carson, M.D.,
with Cecile Murphey.***

1. According to the passage, list TWO things that Curtis and Ben's mother said they must do and TWO things that they must not do in order to improve their grades. (4pts)

2. Give one event which made Ben realize that reading was important when he was in fifth grade. (1pt)

B. How did Ben's improved performance in the fifth grade make him feel about himself? (2pts)

3. Explain the meaning of the following words as they are used in the passage.

a. drummed (2pts)

b. preselect (2pts)

c. flipped through (2pts)

4. From the list below select the **THREE** adjectives which best describe the mother's relationship with her children. (3pts)

concern, unkind, cruel, encouraging, strict, easy going

B. Give **ONE** reason to support EACH of the adjectives. (3pts)

5. According to the passage, what is the secret to success? (1pt)

Total marks: 20