When Thomas Rockwell’s book *How to Eat Fried Worms* was first published in 1973, it marked the first book of its kind: a high-interest, low readability level story that got legions of otherwise reluctant readers – generally boys – suddenly excited about reading. Readers were so grossed out (and delighted) by the book’s recurring scenario of a boy chewing and swallowing worms on a dare – we get nauseous even describing it – that they didn’t even notice that they were suddenly practicing all those skills their teachers spent so much time working on: reading fluently, reading with comprehension, and, if they were reading it aloud, reading with more expression than Shakespearean actors at the Old Vic in London.

Today, some thirty-odd years after *How to Eat Fried Worms* was first published, Walden Media is pleased to join with New Line Cinema to bring the adaptation of this modern gross-out classic to the screen. We’ve taken Rockwell’s original premise, given it a more contemporary feel, reduced the number of worms Billy has to eat and the time frame for eating them, and emphasized how important it is to stand up for your own beliefs, even when no one else will.

In an era when television contestants regularly win big bucks for eating worms (among other things) and challenges are taken at the drop of a hat, *How to Eat Fried Worms* still stands in a league of its own, as a story that turns even the most reluctant readers into avid readers, as a story that shows kids that they can stand firm in their convictions, and as a story that, if you really, really think about it, is just plain disgusting – a story with a timeless charm all its own.

Eleven year-old Billy inadvertently challenges the school bully on his first day at a new school. To save face and earn the respect of his new classmates, Billy agrees to a bet that will determine his fate at the school – whether or not he can eat ten worms in one day. As the pressure mounts, he must summon heroic strength to keep his five year-old brother from blabbing, his weak stomach from betraying him, and his big mouth from getting him into more trouble than he’s already in.

Cary Granat & Micheal Flaherty
Co-Founders
Walden Media

Read the Book from
Random House Children’s Books
*How to Eat Fried Worms* by Thomas Rockwell
Movie tie-in, ISBN: 0440421853

Or, listen to the audiobook from Listening Library:
CDs, ISBN: 9780739336564

**IN THEATRES**
**AUGUST 25, 2006!**
Q. Do you have a favorite illustration of your father’s?
A. I don’t have a favorite illustration of my father’s, but I’m in a few of them. There is a [Saturday Evening] Post cover of me as a young boy reaching up into the pocket of a man’s coat while a puppy looks out of the other pocket, one of me gleefully reading my sister’s diary, and a calendar of me as a Cub Scout learning to tie a knot.

Q. Can you think of a goofy dare you took as a kid? Or that you dared of a friend?
A. I spent a long afternoon getting up the nerve to jump out the window of a covered bridge into the swiftly flowing Batten Kill River.

Q. What is the biggest idea that you’d like to impart to kids reading How To Eat Fried Worms?
A. Doing something difficult, even (as with eating worms) yucky, may lead to something nice – as well as a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

The idea for How to Eat Fried Worms came from a big disappointment. As author Thomas Rockwell explains, “I’d just come back from a meeting with an editor that hadn’t gone well. They didn’t like the book I’d just written and I was feeling unhappy, like I could eat fried worms.” Thus, the modern classic was born.

Thomas Rockwell grew up in a small Vermont town. While his brothers copied the work of their father, artist and illustrator Norman Rockwell, Thomas was drawn to words and knew he wanted to write from a young age. In the Rockwell family, pictures and words tell stories, so it seems fitting to bring words and pictures together – in a movie adaptation of How to Eat Fried Worms.

Walden Media interviewed Thomas Rockwell to talk about how he tells stories with his writing, the stories his father told with pictures, and the movie adaptation of How to Eat Fried Worms.

Check out www.walden.com for additional activities!

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Telling stories with pictures and words:
LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON!

Norman Rockwell’s illustrations tell entire stories. Read the following excerpt of Billy’s dream from Chapter 14 of How to Eat Fried Worms, “The Pain and the Blood and the Gore.” Illustrate Billy’s nightmare the way you think Norman Rockwell might have illustrated it.

Look at the Norman Rockwell illustration to the right. Write a story about the illustration as you think his son, author Thomas Rockwell (that’s him!), might have written it.

Before Billy knew what was happening, he was seated at a table in Longchamps Restaurant on Times Square in New York City with a large napkin tied under his chin, and a waiter was uncovering a platter on which lay one of the huge black worms, coiled snakily, a red, red rose wobbling in the center of its coils.

“How can I ever finish it?” said Billy and cut into a mammoth coil. Steaming pink juice flooded out. Billy ate and ate and ate and ate and then looked…and…and…he must have eaten more than that? And he looked again and there was no hole at all. He had eaten and eaten and eaten…nothing at all!

And then he felt something cold on his ankles and looked under the tablecloth and there were two more of the huge worms wound around and around his ankles. And then he felt something weighing down his arm and he looked and there was another worm wound around his arm, glaring hungrily at him with bloodshot eyes, and from everywhere in the vast room, winding between the tables, waiters approached carrying huge silver serving platters…

YOUR TURN!

© 1942 SEPS

Text © 1973 by Thomas Rockwell

Like Father, Like Son

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All About Worms!

You might think of it as slimy or gross, but the earthworm is also a hard-working little giant. Read about why earthworms deserve more respect.

Earthworms are important for flowers, crops, and animals. Earthworms feed on dead leaves and animals (leaf litter) in soil. Worm waste, called castings, is deposited on the surface. This provides food for other animals. The castings break down in the soil to release nutrients that plants use as food.

There can be anywhere from 50,000 to a million earthworms in one acre of soil! They eat up to 10 tons of leaf stems and dead roots a year and turn over 40 tons of soil. If all the earthworms in the world vanished, think how much leaf litter would remain in the soil!


WORMS GO TO WORK!

You read about kids eating worms. But did you also wonder about what worms eat? You can learn about an important job worms perform when they eat the food scraps left by humans. Make your very own worm bin to find out. Ask a parent, librarian, or educator to go to: http://www.walden.com/web/teach/worms/composting to help you make a Worm Bin.

Check out www.walden.com for additional activities!

Earthworms have no eyes. They sense vibrations, light, and temperature through special organs in their skin.

Earthworms can live up to 10 years.

The largest earthworm ever found was 22 feet long, from its nose to the tip of its tail. It was found in South Africa.

An earthworm has five hearts.

Baby worms hatch from cocoons smaller than a grain of rice.

There are about 2,700 different kinds of earthworms.
Chew on These Worm Facts!

invertebrates Creatures that have no backbone.

annelids Creatures with segmented bodies. An earthworm is an annelid. The earthworm’s round segments make it look like it is made out of rings.

parts Another word for segments is parts.

prostomium A flap of skin above the earthworm’s mouth. It hangs like a lip to keep unwanted things out of the earthworm’s mouth.

pharynx The worm’s throat. The earthworm pushes its pharynx in and out of its mouth to grab food.

esophagus A tube for food to pass through in the earthworm.

aortic arches An earthworm has five hearts called aortic arches.

crop The place where worms store food and other things they swallow.

gizzard A muscular pouch that helps break down materials before the worm digests them. The earthworm’s gizzard contains grit, or small stones. These also help break down materials.

intestine The part of the worm’s body where material is broken down even more. In the intestine digestive juices are added, too.

clitellum A swollen gland in adult earthworms. The clitellum looks like a saddle. It lets out liquid to form a cocoon for the earthworm’s eggs.

anus The part of the worm where worm castings (waste) come out of the earthworm.

Check out www.walden.com for additional activities!

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Meet the Movie: How to Eat Fried Worms

**This is Billy.** Billy has two problems: a big mouth and a weak stomach.

Billy, his parents, and his annoying little brother Woody just moved to town.

The school bully, Joe, wastes no time letting Billy know who runs the school.

All the other kids seem to be on Joe’s side.

Well, maybe not all the other kids.

When Billy tries to stand up to Joe, he ends up bragging that eating worms is “no big deal.”

Billy’s big mouth betrays him. Will his weak stomach do the same?

Check out [www.walden.com](http://www.walden.com) for additional activities!

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BE AN ACTOR!
Pantomime (act out without any words or sounds) these scenes in small groups. Freeze at the beginning and end of the scene.

1) You are the new kid in class on the first day of school.
2) Your friends dare you to eat a worm.
3) Two bullies come up to you during recess.
4) Your parents catch you red-handed taking worm garnishes like ketchup, mustard, and relish, out of the kitchen.
5) You feel sick to your stomach in the middle of a spelling test.

SUPER HERO BILLY

If Billy were a Super Hero, what would his name be?
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What would he look like?
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What kind of super powers would he have?
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What would his Super Hero symbol be?

Make a poster and illustrate it with your ideas.
Recommended Reading

YALSA and Walden Media have selected these books, which span a broad range of reading and maturity levels. We encourage adults to take an active role in helping individual students choose which books are the best fit for them and their families. YALSA is the world leader in selecting books, videos, and audio books for tweens and teens.

Bunting, Eve. *Nasty Stinky Sneakers*. Harper Collins, 1994. Colin wants to win the contest for the Stinkiest Sneakers and has been working on the smell of his shoes for weeks. When the sneakers disappear the day before the contest, Colin just knows that his rival, Jack, is behind it, so he and his best buddy Webster take matters into their own hands. This tale of friendship, mystery, and adventure is delightfully stinky!


Gantos, Jack. *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998*. Joey wants to be a good kid, but when he does not take his meds (or they wear off), he gets “wired” and anything can happen. If he doesn’t get things under control, he knows he’ll be sent to the special ed classroom, but sometimes he just can’t help himself. This hilarious yet poignant novel (the first in the Joey Pigza trilogy) shows the reader the inside world of an ADHD child through Joey’s first-person narration.

Korman, Gordon. *Nose Pickers from Outer Space*. Hyperion, 1999. Devin’s new fourth-grade National Student Exchange buddy, Stan, is a nerd. He has a crew cut, wears a tie, and sticks his finger up his nose. Devin notices that when Stan puts his finger up his nose, unusual things happen, and discovers that Stan is actually from another planet, checking out the suitability of Planet Earth for vacations for his fellow Pants.

Manes, Stephen. *Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days! Yearling*, 1996. Even though the author on the back cover doesn’t look perfect, Milo still decides to give the book, Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days!, a try. But who’s ever heard of wearing a stalk of broccoli around your neck for twenty-four hours? And that’s only the first day...

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *The Boys Start the War, Yearling*, 2002. The Hatford brothers are surprised when three sisters, instead of brothers, move into the house across the river. They decide to make the sisters so miserable that they won’t want to stay. Pranks and tricks ensue—first by the boys, then by the girls—until someone is taken prisoner! A fun-filled war of wits.

Paulsen, Gary. *How Angel Peterson Got His Name And Other Outrageous Tales About Extreme Sports*. Wendy Lamb Books, 2003. Gary Paulsen relates a series of bizarre and daredevil feats attempted by his friends during their childhood in Minnesota. This title was selected for YALSA’s Best Books for Young Adults, 1994.

Rockwell, Thomas. *How to Fight a Girl, Yearling*, 1988. The kids from *How to Eat Fried Worms* are back. Jealous of the dirt bike Billy earned eating all those worms, the neighborhood kids are out to get him. Tempers and the action heat up in this sequel to *How to Eat Fried Worms*.

Sachar, Louis. *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*, HarperTrophy, 1998. Wayside School was supposed to be a one-story building with 30 classrooms, but instead, it’s 30 stories high with one classroom per floor. Read about the strange happenings to the students at Wayside School.

Solheim, James. *It’s Disgusting and We Ate It! True Food Facts from Around the World and Throughout History*. Simon and Schuster Children’s Publishing, 1998. Rat stew! Soup made from bird spit! Cicada fat! All these and even more horrifying dishes have been enjoyed by people all over the world, and all throughout history — and there may even be a few horrors lurking in your own refrigerator!

For more lists of recommended reading, go to www.walden.com or www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists.

Additional *How to Eat Fried Worms* activities are available at: www.walden.com/web/teach/worms

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