



# Activity One

## Dreams

*"In the dream from which he'd wakened he had wandered in a cave where the child led him by the hand. Their light playing over the wet flowstone walls. Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast. Deep stone flues where the water dripped and sang. Tolling in the silence the minutes of the earth and the hours and the days of it and the years without cease. Until they stood in a great stone room where lay a black*



*and ancient lake. And on the far shore a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders. It swung its head low over the water as if to take the scent of what it could not see. Crouching there pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it. Its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell. It swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned and lurched away and loped soundlessly into the dark."*

*"He woke in the darkness, coughing softly. He lay listening. The boy sat by the fire wrapped in a blanket watching him. Drip of water. A fading light. Old dreams encroached upon the waking world. The dripping was in the cave. The light was a candle which the boy bore in a ringstick of beaten copper. The wax splattered on the stones. Tracks of unknown creatures in the mortified loess. In that cold corridor they had reached the point of no return which was measured from the first solely by the light they carried with them."*

Dreams are a motif that run through the novel. Their meaning is in the type: good dreams mean death is coming; bad, that the struggle for life will continue.

Yet, from the father's perspective, dreams and reality begin to merge as the story nears its end. All the way through, his musings take a dream-like tone as well.

Find and analyze both the father's dreams and his conscious reveries together with the imagery of his son's "glow" in the last days of his life. Do the dreams form a narrative? If so, does it reflect the narrative of the story? Otherwise, what do you think the dreams do mean?



# Activity Two

## Survival

"The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions. He got up and went to the window. What is it? she said. He didn't answer. He went into the bathroom and threw the lightswitch but the power was already gone. A dull rose glow in the windowglass. He dropped to one knee and raised the lever to stop the tub and then turned on both taps as far as they would go. She was standing in the doorway in her nightwear, clutching the jamb, cradling her belly in one hand. What is it? she said. What is happening?"

I dont know.

Why are you taking a bath?

I'm not.

The bunker was walled with concrete block. A poured concrete floor laid over with kitchen tile. There were a couple of iron cots with bare springs, one against either wall, the mattress pads rolled up at the foot of them in army fashion. He turned and looked at the boy crouched above him blinking in the smoke rising up from the lamp and then he descended to the lower steps and sat and held the lamp out. Oh my God, he whispered. Oh my God.

What is it Papa?

Come down. Oh my God. Come down.

Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten gallon plastic jerry jugs. Paper towels, toiletpaper, paper plates. Plastic trashbags stuffed with blankets. He held his forehead in his hand. Oh my God, he said. He looked back at the boy. It's all right, he said. Come down.

Papa?

Come down. Come down and see.

He stood the lamp on the step and went up and took the boy by the hand. Come on, he said. It's all right.

What did you find?

I found everything. Everything..."

Survivalism, the movement to prepare for a disruption due to (among other things) nuclear war, has been around since the 1960s.

Except for the bunker that the father and son find, the novel does not allude to the survivalist movement. Yet the movement is quite strong today (especially since 9/11/01) and many people have taken steps to make sure they survive a global nuclear conflict.

Research the methods of survivalists and outline a story describing how a small group of such people would be dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster in the novel many years after it happened.



The Official U.S. Government Booklet





# Activity Three

## Subsistence Farming

*"They walked out through the woods. The light was falling. They followed the flats along the upper river among huge dead trees. A rich southern wood that once held may-apple and pipsissewa. Ginseng. The raw dead limbs of the rhododendron twisted and knotted and black. He stopped. Something in the mulch and ash. He stooped and cleared it away. A small colony of them, shrunken, dried and wrinkled. He picked one and held it up and sniffed it. He bit a piece from the edge and chewed."*

*"... He walked up through the orchard and then he stopped again. He'd stepped on something. He took a step back and knelt and parted the grass with his hands. It was an apple. He picked it up and held it to the light. Hard and brown and shriveled. He wiped it with the cloth and bit into it. Dry and almost tasteless. But an apple..."*

*"The next day they headed inland. A vast low swale where ferns and hydrangeas and wild orchids lived on in ashen effigies which the wind had not yet reached."*

Despite initial appearances, the world in which the father and son find themselves years after the nuclear war is not devoid of plant life. Though circumstances prevent them from staying in one place long enough to try it, others in the world of *The Road* may well have taken up subsistence agriculture to survive.

Research and write a report on Subsistence Farming, focusing on methods best suited to poor growing conditions (poor soil, little light, short growing season, etc.)



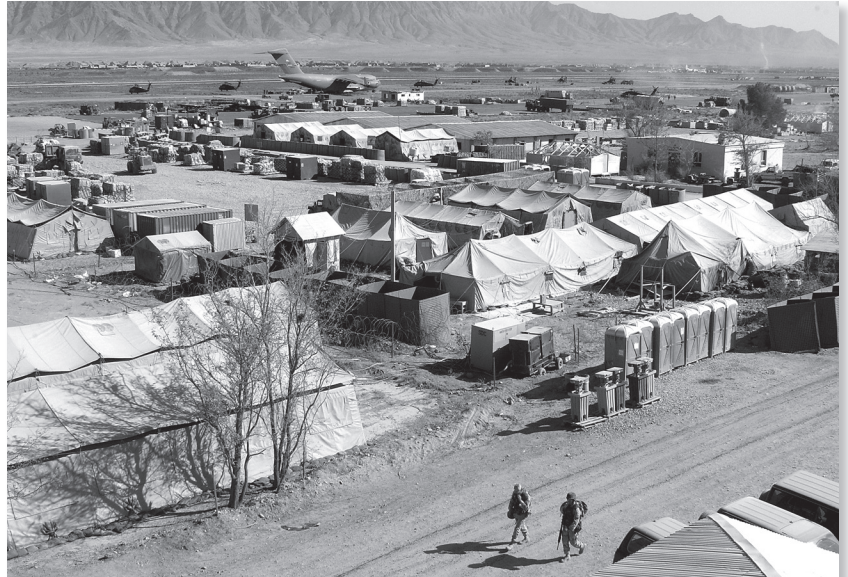
*A potato crop on a subsistence farm in Cyanika, Rwanda.*



# Activity Four

## Restoring Order

"...An army in tennis shoes, tramping. Carrying three-foot lengths of pipe with leather wrappings. Lanyards at the wrist. Some of the pipes were threaded through with lengths of chain fitted at their ends with every manner of bludgeon. They clanked past, marching with a swaying gait like wind-up toys. Bearded, their breath smoking through their masks. Shh, he said. Shh. The phalanx following carried spears or lances tasseled with ribbons, the long blades hammered out of trucksprings in some crude forge up-country. The boy lay with his face in his arms, terrified. They passed two hundred



A modern military camp in Afghanistan.

feet away, the ground shuddering lightly. Tramping. Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each. All passed on."

The perspective of *The Road* is necessarily narrow. Cormac McCarthy chose to make this a story about a father and son living right on the edge of death every day. In the larger context of the world that these two find themselves in, many things are likely happening that we — as readers — do not have access to.

One of them that is hinted at in the novel concerns the militia that the protagonists barely avoid being noticed by. Though we are meant to be as terrified by it as the two of them are, in reality it represents one of the few signs that — long term — humanity might recover.

Suppose the militia in the novel is organized enough that they keep records and plan scouting and foraging parties. Write a report, detailing the events of a single day's activities of this group.

OR

Write a report detailing how the militia might go about bringing order to this apocalyptic world.





# Activity Five

## Preserving the Past

A truth of even a global disaster, such as the nuclear conflict that befell the world of *The Road* is that, in addition to civilians, governments would have taken steps to preserve as much as possible and so shorten the time it took for humanity to return to something resembling normal.

Though it does not enter the sphere of the narrative, the (former) government of the United States will have taken such steps.

Research and write a report on the preparations for survival of a global nuclear conflict by the United States.

*Right: An underground bomb shelter built during the Cold War.*

*Below: An example of the devastation caused by a nuclear attack.*







# Activity Six

## Recovery

*"He got up and walked out to the road. The black shape of it running from dark to dark. Then a distant low rumble. Not thunder. You could feel it under your feet. A sound without cognate and so without description. Something imponderable shifting out there in the dark. The earth itself contracting with the cold. It did not come again. What time of year? What age the child? He walked out into the road and stood. The silence. The salitter drying from the earth. The mudstained shapes of flooded cities burned to the waterline. At a crossroads a ground set with dolmen stones where the spoken bones of oracles lay moldering. No sound but the wind."*

Is recovery possible? Not for us, particularly, but for life on Earth. Would things ever get back to the way they were? The nuclear winter that the father and his son struggle through is years old. Even at the end, there is still no sight of the Sun—and it seems to be getting colder, even years later.

Write a future history of the Earth from the time of the first nuclear detonation to the final "recovered" state of the Earth. Make sure to research the latest research on the long-term effects of multiple atmospheric nuclear detonations on the environment.



*Hiroshima after a nuclear explosion.*