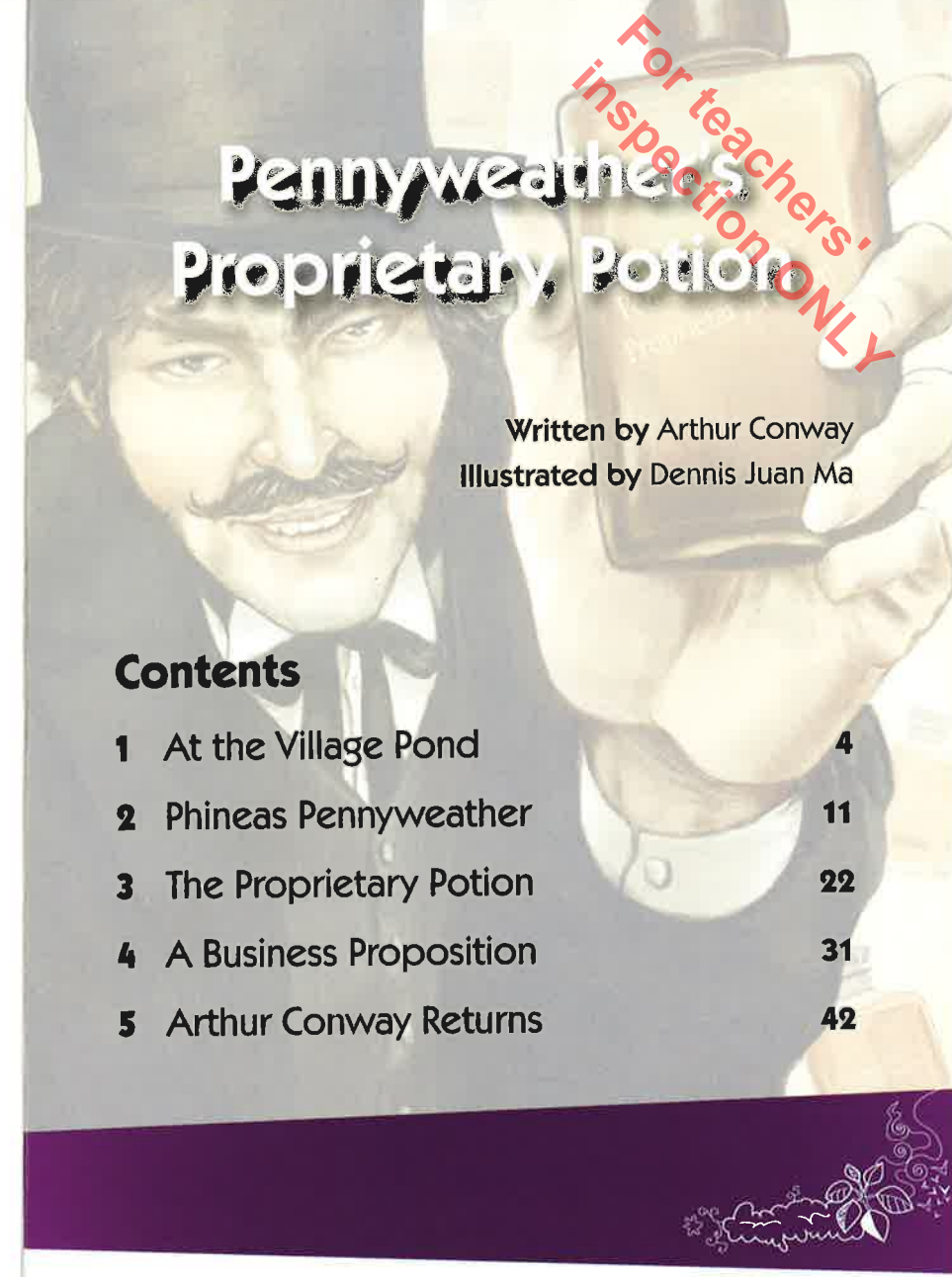
Pennyweather's PROPRIETARY POTION



Arthur Conway

Dennis Juan Ma

Nelson Literacy Directions



Pennyweather's Proprietary Potion

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Written by Arthur Conway
Illustrated by Dennis Juan Ma

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Meet the Characters

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Arthur Conway

A boy from the village of Croaker.



Phineas Pennyweather

A travelling salesman.



Uncle Amos

Arthur's uncle.



Mrs Conway

Arthur's mother.



The villagers

Croaker's inhabitants.

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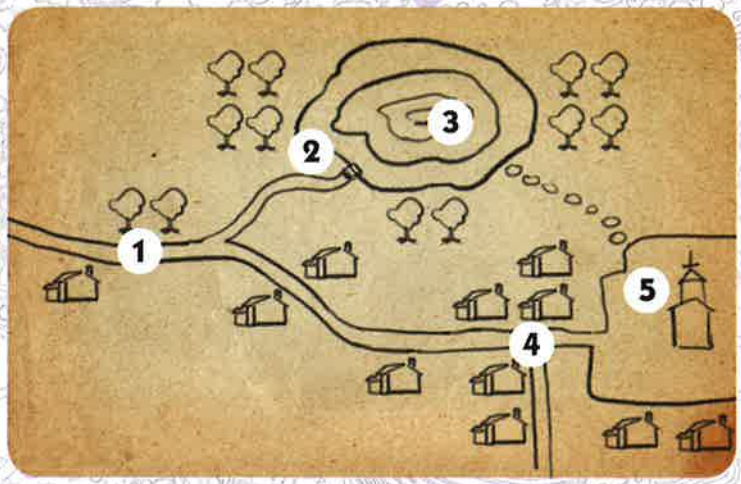
Dear Reader

For those of you who wish to know how I became a successful and respected millionaire, here is my authorised biography. Almost all of it is true, except for the bits that aren't. I hope my story serves as an inspiration for all who believe you can get rich without working hard. That, of course, might be one of the bits that isn't true. That's for you to decide!

Arthur Conway
Author

POSTCARD

Croaker



1. The road to the village
2. The jetty
3. The pond
4. The village of Croaker
5. The church

1 At the Village Pond



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How did it all start? It was the first Saturday of summer, as I recall. The entire population of Croaker under the age of thirteen gathered around the village pond. The braver of us sat with their legs dangling off the jetty at the village pond. Dotted around the banks, the squeamish gathered in groups, at a safe distance, out of range of mischievously flung maggots or stinking strips of bacon that had, until that morning, been hidden in jars under beds until they'd turned green.



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As a member of the brave group, I was on the jetty. Each time one of us threaded a wriggling maggot or a slimy strip of green bacon onto our hook, a chorus of "eergh, yuck" would arise from around the pond. Spurred on by the murmurs of disgust, we maggot impalers and bacon threaders would stand, basking in the revulsion that we imagined was thinly disguised admiration at our bravery. Studiously avoiding any glance at the onlookers, we would toss our baited lines into the murky pond, and resume our seats.

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It had been barely five minutes since the commencement of Croaker's seasonal eel fishing spectacle when the first catch was hauled out of the pond, causing a commotion both on and off the jetty. After due examination, the writhing eel was placed in a wicker basket, slimy hands were wiped on shirts and trousers, and the proud angler embarked upon a tour of display.

The mixture of curiosity and horror the eel provoked amongst the anglers and onlookers was so strong that none of us noticed the horse and cart trundling down the rough, earthen road towards the village. Those of us on the jetty, disappointed that we had been denied the glory of the first catch of the season, stared resolutely at the surface of the pond,

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willing an even bigger and slimier eel to swallow our bait and restore our pride.

"Good morning!" boomed a voice, startling all of us. Along with a dozen other pairs of eyes, I looked towards the man who had spoken. He was sitting atop his cart, tipping a top hat towards us.

"Phineas Pennyweather, purveyor of proprietary potions," he announced, sweeping a hand towards the lettering along the side of his brightly coloured cart, as if to confirm his identity. We stared at the stranger in silence, each of us wondering what a purveyor of proprietary potions was. It sounded serious. I'm sure I wasn't the only one who suspected we were about to get into trouble for some unknown indiscretion that involved maggots, green bacon, ponds or eels.

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"Can you tell me the name of this village?" continued the stranger. "I fear I have taken a wrong turning."

"Croaker," I replied.

"I beg your pardon?" said the man, mistaking my answer for an insult. "Impudent scallywag!" He drew a small, square bottle out of his coat pocket and took a theatrical swig. He cleared his throat. "Very well, I shall ask once more, this time without croaking."

"No, sir," I explained. "The village. It's called Croaker."

"Ah," said the man. "Well, we shall have to see about fixing that. What's your name, young lad?"

"Conway, sir," I replied. "My name is Arthur Conway."

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The man replaced his top hat and, with a nod towards me, twitched his horse's reins. "Good day, Arthur Conway."

A few moments later, the stranger and his horse and cart disappeared around a bend in the road. Curious as we were, we had other more immediate jobs to finish. We returned to the task of clearing the pond of eels and upsetting the onlookers. Alas, the groundwork for that job had already been laid while our attention was elsewhere.

"Where's my eel?" came an accusatory shout. The boy who'd captured the first eel and the morning's glory held an empty wicker basket aloft. "It's escaped."

It took less than thirty seconds for the squeamish amongst the under-thirteen

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population of Croaker to flee noisily towards the village. The prospect of an unseen and highly disgruntled eel wriggling through the grass surrounding the pond made sure of that. And, without an audience, there seemed little point in the brave group staying either. Of course, none of us wanted to admit that, so it took a few minutes of glumly staring at the ripples on the pond before I thought of an option for retreat that would maintain our pride.

"Let's go and see what that Phineas Pennyweather's doing," I suggested.

"Right-o, Arthur," agreed a chorus of relieved voices at once. We packed up, and less than two minutes later, the village pond was deserted, save for a solitary eel wriggling towards its muddy brown waters.

