Instructions: COMPLETE ALL QUESTIONS AND MARGIN NOTES using the CLOSE reading strategies practiced in class. This requires reading of the article three times.

Step 1: Skim the article using these symbols as you read:
(+ agree, (-) disagree, (*) important, (!) surprising, (?) wondering

Step 2: Number the paragraphs. Read the article carefully and make notes in the margin.
Notes should include:
- Comments that show that you understand the article. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important sections may serve this purpose.)
- Questions you have that show what you are wondering about as you read.
- Notes that differentiate between fact and opinion.
- Observations about how the writer’s strategies (organization, word choice, perspective, support) and choices affect the article.

Step 3: A final quick read noting anything you may have missed during the first two reads.

Your margin notes are part of your score for this assessment. Answer the questions carefully in complete sentences unless otherwise instructed.

Student ____________________________ Class Period ________________

YEW TREE

PLACE OF ORIGIN
Britain to N. Iran, widely cultivated in North America.

HABITAT
Prefers chalky soils, and limestones soils but can adapt to most environments. A good example can be found at Muckross, in Killarney National Park, Ireland, on the limestone pavement.

DESCRIPTION
Trees or shrubs, dioecious (male and female separate) or monoecious (male and female elements on same plant). Bark reddish brown, scaly. Branches ascending to drooping; twigs irregularly alternate, green or yellow-green when young, reddish brown in age.

FLOWERING PERIOD
The male trees flower late winter or early spring, producing very small catkins with abundant pollen borne on the wind. Only one seed is formed from each female flower. The fruit grow on the female trees through the Summer and the single hard seed is partly embedded in a pulpy, bright red berry, or aril, which shows up from early September.

MEDICINAL PART
The leaves of the yew are now used to produce a drug which inhibits cancer cell growth permanently, called taxol. Note: leaves, bark and seeds are poisonous; do not ingest. The berries can be used as a laxative.

**LONGEVITY:** The oldest tree in Europe is said to be the Fortingall Yew of Fortingall, Scotland, near Loch Tay. It is 3,000 years old and presently lives surrounded by a cast iron fence in a churchyard. It is 56 1/2 feet in circumference, but the heartwood is missing. Some people estimate that a foot of growth represents thirty years, but this is inexact as trees grow slower or quicker depending on their environment, CO2 levels and varying weather conditions. Because they have been considered sacred trees and were protected as such, and even today are still protected in graveyards. Therefore, there are still some very old examples of yew trees living today.

**HISTORY:** The oldest known wooden implement is a spear made of yew wood, about 50,000 years old, from Clacton-on-Sea, England.

Archeological excavations have found yew bows and knives in Swiss lake dwellings from 10,000 years ago. Historically, yew bows were the weapon of choice for both hunting and warfare throughout most of Europe until the invention of firearms.

Yew was also employed as a poison, used for assassination, suicide, as an arrow poison, and to poison fish and mammals.

Due to its hardness, it was used for shuttles, cogs, axle-trees, and pulley-pins. The colorful wood was used to veneer furniture, to make lute bodies, bowls, tankards, combs, tool handles, pegs, and various art objects. It was used in many ways by various religions, such as drinking-cups for special ceremonies.

Yew forests were once common in France and Germany. The wood of the English Yew was used for bows by Celtic and Teutonic warriors, a practice which eventually led to the demise of the great Yew forests of Western Europe. In many areas of Europe, the Yew had important symbolic significance. A judge's staff was made of its wood and Yew was planted in graveyards as a form of protection from malevolent spirits. Its needles were also used in rituals to communicate with the dead.

**TOXICOLOGY:** The foliage, bark, and seeds - but not the fleshy red aril - of most *Taxus* species are toxic due to the presence of taxine. *T. baccata* (English yew) and *T. cuspidata* (Japanese yew), are best known and documented for toxicity. Cattle have been poisoned by *T. canadensis* planted in British Columbia. Although horses, cattle, and humans have been poisoned by ingesting yew leaves and seeds, the fresh foliage of *T. canadensis* is browsed by deer, and that of *T. brevifolia* by moose with no apparent ill effects. The dried leaves are more toxic than young fresh leaves.

**POISON:** NEVER USE WITHOUT MEDICAL DIRECTION!

The Gereau Center Reading Article
Yew Tree (1200 L)

Comprehension Questions - Answers may be in phrases.

1. Is it likely that there are yew trees in Virginia? Explain why or why not.

2. Name three objects that would have traditionally been crafted from yew wood.

3. Is it safe for people to eat yew berries? Explain.

4. What animals have been able to eat yew leaves safely?

Define the following terms used in the article.

- Aril -
- Inhibit -
- Ingest -
- Demise -
- Malevolent -
According to the article, “some people estimate that a foot of growth represents thirty years” for a yew tree. The oldest known tree is 56.5 feet in circumference. About how old is this particular tree? Show your work.

In *A Monster Calls*, Conor’s mom often stares at or comments on the yew tree in the backyard. The yew tree is also very important to Conor. What does the yew tree symbolize to each character? Explain in a well-developed paragraph.