

THE BALLAD OF SERENITY

Song Lyrics by Sonny Rhodes

Take my love, take my land
Take me where I cannot stand
I don't care, I'm still free
You can't take the sky from me.

Take me out to the black

Tell them I ain't comin' back
Burn the land and boil the sea
You can't take the sky from me.

Leave the men where they lay

They'll never see another day
Lost my soul, lost my dream
You can't take the sky from me.

I feel the black reaching out

I hear its song without a doubt
I still hear and I still see
That you can't take the sky from me.

Lost my love, lost my land

Lost the last place I could stand
There's no place I can't be
Since I've found Serenity

And you can't take the sky from me.

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BE THE CHANGE

Song Lyrics by Corey Smith

Open your eyes people
Take a good look around
Catch the tears filling up all those cracks in the ground
Turn off your televisions
Leave your picture-perfect neighbourhoods
A lot of folks out there ain't doing so good
Too many of us left out in the cold
No invitations given
No welcome mats unrolled

But you can be the change you wanna see
Be the hope to those whose lives are far from easy
Reach out and lend a hand
Share everything you can
And be the change
Be the change

Carry the world on your shoulders for a little while
Put on someone else's shoes and walk a mile
Too many cups runneth over
While so many are going dry
The grass ain't always green on the other side
There is still a lot of work to be done
A lot of wrongs to right
A lot of battles to be won

If you can be the change you wanna see
Be the hope to those whose lives are far from easy
Reach out and lend a hand, share everything you can
And be the change

We all talk about how it ought to be
Because we know talk is cheap
But the time has come to let our actions speak
Yeah it's getting late, no time to waste
Be the change you want to see

Be the change you want to see
Be the hope to those whose lives are far from easy
Reach out and lend a hand
Share everything you can
And be the change
Be the change

Four Voices

Who Am I?

Poem by Felice Holman

The trees ask me,
And the sky,
And the sea asks me
Who am I?

The grass asks me,
And the sand,
And the rocks ask me
Who am I?

The wind tells me
At nightfall,
And the rain tells me
Someone small.

Someone small
Someone small
But a piece
of
it
all.

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Use imagery to create meaning and description.
- Experiment with metaphor.

And I Remember

Poem by Afua Cooper

And I remember
standing
in the churchyard on Wesleyan Hill
standing and looking down on the plains
that stretch before me
like a wide green carpet
the plains full with sugar cane and rice
the plains that lead to the sea
And I remember
walking
as a little girl to school
on the savannahs of Westmoreland
walking from our hillbound village
walking along steep hillsides
walking carefully so as not to trip and plunge
walking into the valley
And I remember
mine
mine
is mine
and plains
rivers
valleys
this sweetness of mountains
this is mine this is mine
thinking
Yes, and I remember

And I remember
running
to school on the road that cuts into the green carpet
running past laughing waters
running to school that rose like a concrete castle
out of my carpet of green
running with a golden Westmoreland breeze
And I remember

And I remember
breathing
the smell of the earth plowed by rain and tractors
breathing the scent of freshly cut cane
breathing the scent of rice plants as they send
their roots into the soft mud



Some mornings
I get up real early before work
and head on up
to the lake.
The slam of the car door
echoes out on the water,
and then
it's like something starts
settling down inside me.
It's settling down into the
open spaces between
my skin and my bones
as I look at that lake
all covered in fog
and gray like rabbit skin.
Sometimes a heron comes
in for a landing,
and it's just me and him,
and all of a sudden
I feel like a heron.

Poem from *Soda Jerk*
by Cynthia Rylant

I stand there
and I am feeling like it's me
floating out on that water.
It's me
picking through those reeds.
It's me flapping my wings and
it's my feet
hanging down uninterested
while the rest of my body works
to fly up off that lake.
Then the heron is gone,
and the jerk is back,
chewing on the styrofoam cup in his hand and
wishing for things
he can't even put a name to.
Quarter to eight
I get back in the car,
and eight on the dot
I am walking into Maywell's.
I am there.
Crossing the floor
with heron feet,
pouring coffee
with heron hands.
Working the day like
I'm flying.

Wanted: Someone Who Cares

Poem by
Shawna Lynne
Danielle
Panipekeesick

Who cares enough to accept me as I am,
Who does not condemn me for my shortcomings,
Who helps me to learn from my mistakes.

Who cares enough to respect me as an individual
with the right to learn and grow at my own pace
and in my own unique fashion.

Who will stand by to help when I need it,
but will release me from my own guilt,

and help me find constructive ways to deal with reality.

Who will encourage me to explore the world about me,

Who will open my eyes to beauty and my ears to music,

Who will listen to my questions and help me find answers.

Who cares enough to help me achieve my full potential,

and who has faith in my ability to develop into a worthwhile person.
Could this someone be me?

1. RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- How does Sandy try to fit in?
- What changed Sandy's mind about wanting to fit in with the "cool" kids?
- Do you find Sandy's actions believable? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt left out or excluded from things? Explain.
- Think about the different "groups" in your school. What are the things that separate one group from another?

STRATEGIES

2. MEDIA MAKER CREATE A POSTER

Design a poster emphasizing the importance of being true to yourself.

As you design your poster, consider the following:

- Think about your audience. What kinds of images will appeal to your target audience?
- Decide on the **tone** that would best suit your subject. Will it be informal, funny, or dramatic?
- Draw a rough sketch before finishing your final poster. It will help you decide the best placement for the visuals and text.
- Create a *slogan* (a short, catchy phrase that is used to attract the reader's attention).
- Choose a visual for your topic.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Examine your poster. Does it present the message you are trying to convey? How could you improve it?

The **tone** is the atmosphere or mood of a piece. It expresses the author's attitude or feeling about the subject of a piece of writing.

*The choices we make can
drastically affect our lives.
One young man finds out just
how important choices can be.*

On the Sidewalk Bleeding

Short Story by Evan Hunter

The boy lay bleeding in the rain. He was sixteen years old, and he wore a bright purple silk jacket, and the lettering across the back of the jacket read THE ROYALS. The boy's name was Andy, and the name was delicately scripted in black thread on the front of the jacket, just over the heart. *Andy*.

He had been stabbed ten minutes ago. The knife had entered just below his rib cage and had been drawn across his body violently, tearing a wide gap in his flesh. He lay on the sidewalk with the March rain drilling his jacket and drilling his body and washing away the blood that poured from his open wound. He had known excruciating pain when the knife had torn across his body and then sudden comparative relief when the blade was pulled away. He had heard the voice saying, "That's for you, Royal!" and then the sound of footsteps hurrying into the rain, and then he had fallen to the sidewalk, clutching his stomach, trying to stop the flow of blood.

He tried to yell for help, but he had no voice. He did not know why his voice had deserted him, or why the rain had become so suddenly fierce, or why there was an open hole in his body from which his life ran redly, steadily. It was 11:30 p.m., but he did not know the time.

There was another thing he did not know.

He did not know he was dying. He lay on the sidewalk, bleeding, and he thought only: *That was a fierce rumble. They got me good that time*, but he did not know he was dying. He would have been frightened had he known. In

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Adapt a story into a media form.
- Examine the features of a newspaper article.



his ignorance, he lay bleeding and wishing he could cry out for help, but there was no voice in his throat. There was only the bubbling of blood from between his lips whenever he opened his mouth to speak. He lay silent in his pain, waiting, waiting for someone to find him.

He could hear the sound of automobile tires hushed on the muzzle of rainswept streets, far away at the other end of the long alley. He lay with his face pressed to the sidewalk, and he could see the splash of neon far away at the other end of the alley, tinting the pavement red and green, slickly brilliant in the rain.

He wondered if Laura would be angry.

He had left the dance to get a package of cigarettes. He had told her he would be back in a few minutes, and then he had gone downstairs and found the candy store closed. He knew that Alfredo's on the next block would be open until at least two, and he had started through the alley, and that was when he'd been ambushed. He could hear the faint sound of music now, coming from a long, long way off, and he wondered if Laura was dancing, wondered if she had missed him yet. Maybe she thought he wasn't coming back. Maybe she thought he'd cut out for good. Maybe she'd already left the dance and gone home. He thought of her face, the brown eyes and the jet-black hair, and thinking of her he forgot his pain a little, forgot that blood was rushing from his body. Someday he would marry Laura. Someday he would marry her, and they would have a lot of kids, and then they would get out of the neighborhood. They would move to a clean project in the Bronx, or maybe they would move to Staten Island. When they were married, when they had kids...

He heard footsteps at the other end of the alley, and he lifted his cheek from the sidewalk and looked into the darkness and tried to cry out, but again there was only a soft hissing bubble of blood on his mouth.

The man came down the alley. He had not seen Andy yet. He walked, and then stopped to lean against the brick of the building, and then walked again. He saw Andy then and came toward him, and he stood over him for a long time, the minutes ticking, ticking, watching him and not speaking.

Then he said, "What's a matter, buddy?"

Andy could not speak, and he could barely move. He lifted his face slightly and looked up at the man, and in the rainswept alley he smelled the sickening odor of alcohol and realized the man was drunk. He did not feel any particular panic. He did not know he was dying, and so he felt only mild disappointment that the man who had found him was drunk.

The man was smiling.

"Did you fall down, buddy?" he asked.

"You mus' be as drunk as I am." He grinned, seemed to remember why he had entered the alley in the first place, and said, "Don't go way. I'll be ri' back."

The man lurched away. Andy heard his footsteps, and then the sound of the man colliding with a garbage can, and some mild swearing, lost in the steady wash of the rain. He waited for the man to come back.

It was 11:39.

When the man returned, he squatted alongside Andy. He studied him with drunken dignity.

"You gonna catch cold here," he said. "What's a matter? You like layin' in the wet?"

Andy could not answer. The man tried to focus his eyes on Andy's face. The rain spattered around them.

"You like a drink?"

Andy shook his head.

"I gotta bottle. Here," the man said. He pulled a pint bottle from his inside jacket pocket. He uncapped it and extended it to Andy. Andy tried to move, but pain wrenched him back flat against the sidewalk.

"Take it," the man said. He kept watching Andy. "Take it." When Andy did not move, he said, "Nev' mind, I'll have one m'self." He tilted the bottle to his lips and then wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "You too young to be drinkin', anyway. Should be 'shamed of yourself, drunk an' layin' in a alley, all wet. Shame on you. I gotta good mind calla cop."

Andy nodded. Yes, he tried to say. Yes, call a cop. Please. Call one.

"Oh, you don' like that, huh?" the drunk said. "You don' wanna cop to fin' you all drunk an' wet in a alley, huh? Okay, buddy. This time you get off easy." He got to his feet. "This time you lucky," he said. He waved broadly at Andy, and then almost lost his footing. "S'long, buddy," he said.

Wait, Andy thought. Wait, please, I'm bleeding.

"S'long," the drunk said again. "I see you aroun'," and then he staggered off up the alley.

Andy lay and thought: *Laura, Laura. Are you dancing?*

The couple came into the alley suddenly. They ran into the alley together, running from the rain, the boy holding the girl's elbow, the girl spreading a newspaper over her head to protect her hair. Andy lay crumpled against the pavement, and he watched them run into the alley laughing, and then duck into the doorway not ten feet from him.

"Man, what rain!" the boy said. "You could drown out there."

"I have to get home," the girl said. "It's late, Freddie. I have to get home."

"We got time," Freddie said. "Your people won't raise a fuss if you're a

little late. Not with this kind of weather."

"It's dark," the girl said, and she giggled.

"Yeah," the boy answered, his voice very low.

"Freddie...?"

"Um?"

"You're...you're standing very close to me."

"Um."

There was a long silence. Then the girl said, "Oh," only that single word, and Andy knew she'd been kissed, and he suddenly hungered for Laura's mouth. It was then that he wondered if he would ever kiss Laura again. It was then that he wondered if he was dying.

No, he thought, I can't be dying, not from a little street rumble, not from just getting cut. Guys get cut all the time in rumbles. I can't be dying. No, that's stupid. That don't make any sense at all.

"You shouldn't," the girl said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"I love you, Angela," the boy said.

"I love you, too, Freddie," the girl said, and Andy listened and thought: *I love you, Laura. Laura, I think maybe I'm dying. Laura, this is stupid but I think maybe I'm dying. Laura, I think I'm dying!*

He tried to speak. He tried to move. He tried to crawl toward the doorway where he could see the two figures in embrace. He tried to make a noise, a sound, and a grunt came from his lips, and then he tried again, and another grunt came, a low animal grunt of pain.

"What was that?" the girl said, suddenly alarmed, breaking away from the boy.

"I don't know," he answered.

"Go look, Freddie."

"No. Wait."

Andy moved his lips again. Again the sound came from him.

"Freddie!"

"What?"

"I'm scared."

"I'll go see," the boy said.

He stepped into the alley. He walked over to where Andy lay on the ground. He stood over him, watching him.

"You all right?" he asked.

"What is it?" Angela said from the doorway.

"Somebody's hurt," Freddie said.

"Let's get out of here," Angela said.

"No. Wait a minute." He knelt down beside Andy. "You cut?" he asked.

Andy nodded. The boy kept looking at him. He saw the lettering on the jacket then. THE ROYALS. He turned to Angela.

"He's a Royal," he said.

"Let's...what...what do you want to do, Freddie?"

"I don't know. I don't want to get mixed up in this. He's a Royal. We help him, and the Guardians'll be down our necks. I don't want to get mixed up in this, Angela."

"Is he...is he hurt bad?"

"Yeah, it looks that way."

"What shall we do?"

"I don't know."

"We can't leave him here in the rain." Angela hesitated. "Can we?"

"If we get a cop, the Guardians'll find out who," Freddie said. "I don't know, Angela. I don't know."

Angela hesitated a long time before answering. Then she said, "I have to get home, Freddie. My people will begin to worry."

"Yeah." Freddie said. He looked at Andy again. "You all right?" he asked. Andy lifted his face from the sidewalk, and his eyes said: *Please, please help me*, and maybe Freddie read what his eyes were saying, and maybe he didn't.

Behind him, Angela said, "Freddie, let's get out of here! Please!" There was urgency in her voice, urgency bordering on the edge of panic. Freddie stood up. He looked at Andy again, and then mumbled, "I'm sorry," and then he took Angela's arm and together they ran toward the neon splash at the other end of the alley.

Why, they're afraid of the Guardians, Andy thought in amazement. But why should they be? I wasn't afraid of the Guardians. I never turkeyed out of a rumble with the Guardians. I got heart. But I'm bleeding.

The rain was soothing somehow. It was a cold rain, but his body was hot all over, and the rain helped to cool him. He had always liked rain. He could remember sitting in Laura's house one time, the rain running down the windows, and just looking out over the street, watching the people running from the rain. That was when he'd first joined the Royals. He could remember how happy he was the Royals had taken him. The Royals and the Guardians, two of the biggest. He was a Royal. There had been meaning to the title.

Now, in the alley, with the cold rain washing his hot body, he wondered about the meaning. If he died, he was Andy. He was not a Royal. He was simply Andy, and he was dead. And he wondered suddenly if the Guardians who had ambushed him and knifed him had ever once realized he was Andy.

Had they known that he was Andy, or had they simply known that he was a Royal wearing a purple silk jacket? Had they stabbed *him*, Andy, or had they only stabbed the jacket and the title, and what good was the title if you were dying?

I'm Andy, he screamed wordlessly. *I'm Andy!*

An old lady stopped at the other end of the alley. The garbage cans were stacked there, beating noisily in the rain. The old lady carried an umbrella with broken ribs, carried it with all the dignity of a queen. She stepped into the mouth of the alley, a shopping bag over one arm. She lifted the lids of the garbage cans delicately, and she did not hear Andy grunt because she was a little deaf and because the rain was beating a steady relentless tattoo on the cans. She had been searching and foraging for the better part of the night. She collected her string and her newspapers, and an old hat with a feather on it from one of the garbage cans, and a broken footstool from another of the cans. And then she delicately replaced the lids and lifted her umbrella high and walked out of the alley mouth with queenly dignity. She had worked swiftly and soundlessly, and now she was gone.

The alley looked very long now. He could see people passing at the other end of it, and he wondered who the people were, and he wondered if he would ever get to know them, wondered who it was on the Guardians who had stabbed him, who had plunged the knife into his body.

"That's for you, Royal!" the voice had said, and then the footsteps, his arms being released by the others, the fall to the pavement. "That's for you, Royal!" Even in his pain, even as he collapsed, there had been some sort of pride in knowing he was a Royal. Now there was no pride at all. With the rain beginning to chill him, with the blood pouring steadily between his fingers, he knew only a sort of dizziness, and within the giddy dizziness, he could only think: *I want to be Andy.*

It was not very much to ask of the world.

He watched the world passing at the other end of the alley. The world didn't know he was Andy. The world didn't know he was alive. He wanted to say, "Hey, I'm alive! Hey, look at me! I'm alive! Don't you know I'm alive? Don't you know I exist?"

He felt weak and very tired. He felt alone and wet and feverish and chilled, and he knew he was going to die now, and the knowledge made him suddenly sad. He was not frightened. For some reason, he was not frightened. He was only filled with an overwhelming sadness that his life would be over at sixteen. He felt all at once as if he had never done anything, never seen anything, never been anywhere. There were so many things to do, and he wondered why he'd never thought of them before, wondered why the rumbles

and the dances and the purple jacket had always seemed so important to him before, and now they seemed like such small things in a world he was missing, a world that was rushing past at the other end of the alley.

I don't want to die, he thought. I haven't lived yet.

It seemed very important to him that he take off the purple jacket. He was very close to dying, and when they found him, he did not want them to say, "Oh, it's a Royal." With great effort, he rolled over onto his back. He felt the pain tearing at his stomach when he moved, a pain he did not think was possible. But he wanted to take off the jacket. If he never did another thing, he wanted to take off the jacket. The jacket had only one meaning now, and that was a very simple meaning.

If he had not been wearing the jacket, he would not have been stabbed. The knife had not been plunged in hatred of Andy. The knife hated only the purple jacket. The jacket was a stupid meaningless thing that was robbing him of his life. He wanted the jacket off his back. With an enormous loathing, he wanted the jacket off his back.

He lay struggling with the shiny wet material. His arms were heavy, and pain ripped fire across his body whenever he moved. But he squirmed and fought and twisted until one arm was free and then the other, and then he rolled away from the jacket and lay quite still, breathing heavily, listening to the sound of his breathing and the sound of the rain and thinking: *Rain is sweet, I'm Andy.*

She found him in the alleyway a minute past midnight. She left the dance to look for him, and when she found him she knelt beside him and said, "Andy, it's me, Laura."

He did not answer her. She backed away from him, tears springing into her eyes, and then she ran from the alley hysterically and did not stop running until she found the cop.

And now, standing with the cop, she looked down at him, and the cop rose and said, "He's dead," and all the crying was out of her now. She stood in the rain and said nothing, looking at the dead boy on the pavement, and looking at the purple jacket that rested a foot away from his body.

The cop picked up the jacket and turned it over in his hands.

"A Royal, huh?" he said.

The rain seemed to beat more steadily now, more fiercely.

She looked at the cop and, very quietly, she said, "His name is Andy."

The cop slung the jacket over his arm. He took out his black pad, and he flipped it open to a blank page.

"A Royal," he said.

Then he began writing.

1. RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- Why don't any of the people who find Andy help him?
- Why did Andy join a gang? With a partner, discuss Andy's reasons and whether or not they make sense to you.
- Why does Andy take off his jacket?
- What conclusions can you draw from the police officer's comment at the end of the story?

STRATEGIES

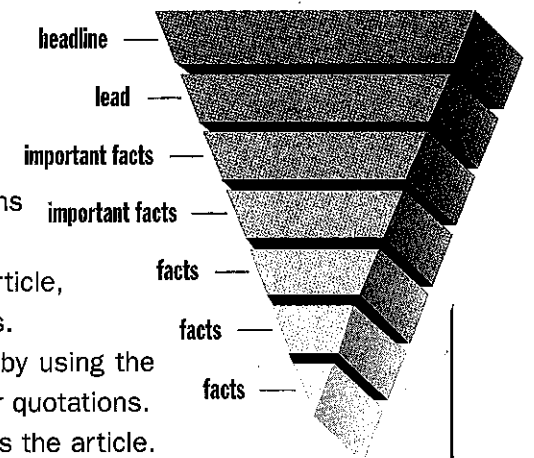
2. WRITING CREATE A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Write a short newspaper article reporting on the events surrounding Andy's death. Write quotes for the characters who came into contact with Andy. What do you think they will say about why they didn't help Andy?

Remember that newspaper articles are usually short, factual reports about people and events. Most articles are written in the inverted pyramid style. This means that each paragraph arranges information in order of significance. It also stands on its own and does not depend on the next paragraph to explain it. You could read newspaper articles to help you become familiar with styles. Here are a few suggestions to help you with your article:

- Begin with the most interesting and important details. This is called the lead, and it should answer the questions *who, what, when, and where.*
- Put other important facts next in the article, and answer the *why* and *how* questions.
- Bring the article to life for the reader by using the dialogue from the story to develop your quotations.
- Write a catchy, short headline that suits the article.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Read over your article and ask yourself these questions. Is the lead clear? Have I included the important facts? Will the reader understand my article?



Have you ever stood up for something you believe in? A brave and proud woman takes a different path at the...

Borders

Short Story by Thomas King

W

hen I was maybe thirteen, my mother announced that we were going to go to Salt Lake City to visit my sister who had left the reserve, moved across the line, and found a job. Laetitia had not left home with my

mother's blessing, but over time my mother had come to be proud of the fact that Laetitia had done all of this on her own.

"She did really good," my mother would say.

Then there were the fine points to Laetitia's going. She had not, as my mother liked to tell Mrs. Manyfingers, gone floating after some man like a balloon on a string. She hadn't snuck out of the house, either, and gone to Vancouver or Edmonton or Toronto to chase rainbows down alleys.

"She did real good."

I was seven or eight when Laetitia left home. She was seventeen. Our father was from Rocky Boy on the American side.

"Dad's American," Laetitia told my mother, "so I can go and come as I please."

"Send us a postcard."

Laetitia packed her things, and we headed for the border. Just outside of Milk River, Laetitia told us to watch for the water tower.

"Over the next rise. It's the first thing you see."

"We got a water tower on the reserve," my mother said. "There's a big one in Lethbridge, too."

GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Develop characters
- Examine complex sentences.



"You'll be able to see the tops of the flagpoles, too. That's where the border is."

When we got to Coutts, my mother stopped at the convenience store and bought her and Laetitia a cup of coffee. I got an Orange Crush.

◆◆◆

"This is real lousy coffee."

"You're just angry because I want to see the world."

"It's the water. From here on down, they got lousy water."

"I can catch the bus from Sweetgrass. You don't have to lift a finger."

"You're going to have to buy your water in bottles if you want good coffee."

There was an old wooden building about a block away, with a tall sign in the yard that said "Museum." Most of the roof had been blown away. Mom told me to go and see when the place was open. There were boards over the windows and doors. You could tell that the place was closed, and I told Mom so, but she said to go and check anyway. Mom and Laetitia stayed by the car. Neither one of them moved. I sat down on the steps of the museum and watched them, and I don't know that they ever said anything to each other. Finally, Laetitia got her bag out of the trunk and gave Mom a hug.

I wandered back to the car. The wind had come up, and it blew Laetitia's hair across her face. Mom reached out and pulled the strands out of Laetitia's eyes, and Laetitia let her.

"You can still see the mountain from here," my mother told Laetitia in Blackfoot.

"Lots of mountains in Salt Lake," Laetitia told her in English.

"The place is closed," I said. "Just like I told you."

Laetitia tucked her hair into her jacket and dragged her bag down the road to the brick building with the American flag flapping on a pole. When she got to where the guards were waiting, she turned, put the bag down, and waved to us. We waved back. Then my mother turned the car around, and we came home.

We got postcards from Laetitia regular, and, if she wasn't spreading jelly on the truth, she was happy. She found a good job and rented an apartment with a pool.

"And she can't even swim," my mother told Mrs. Manyfingers.

◆◆◆

Most of the postcards said we should come down and see the city, but whenever I mentioned this, my mother would stiffen up.

So I was surprised when she bought two new tires for the car and put on her blue dress with the green and yellow flowers. I had to dress up, too, for my mother did not want us crossing the border looking like slobs. We made sandwiches and put them in a big box with pop and potato chips and some apples and bananas and a big jar of water.

"But we can stop at one of those restaurants, too, right?"

"We maybe should take some blankets in case you get sleepy."

"But we can stop at one of those restaurants, too, right?"

The border was actually two towns, though neither one was big enough to amount to anything. Coutts was on the Canadian side and consisted of the convenience store and gas station, the museum that was closed and boarded up, and a motel. Sweetgrass was on the American side, but all you could see was an overpass that arched across the highway and disappeared into the prairies. Just hearing the names of these towns, you would expect that Sweetgrass, which is a nice name and sounds like it is related to other places such as Medicine Hat and Moose Jaw and Kicking Horse Pass, would be on the Canadian side, and that Coutts, which sounds abrupt and rude, would be on the American side. But this was not the case.

Between the two borders was a duty-free shop where you could buy cigarettes and liquor and flags. Stuff like that.

We left the reserve in the morning and drove until we got to Coutts.

"Last time we stopped here," my mother said, "you had an Orange Crush. You remember that?"

"Sure," I said. "That was when Laetitia took off."

"You want another Orange Crush?"

"That means we're not going to stop at a restaurant, right?"

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My mother got a coffee at the convenience store, and we stood around and watched the prairies move in the sunlight. Then we climbed back in the car. My mother straightened the dress across her thighs, leaned against the wheel, and drove all the way to the border in first gear, slowly, as if she were trying to see through a bad storm or riding high on black ice.

The border guard was an old guy. As he walked to the car, he swayed from side to side, his feet set wide apart, the holster on his hip pitching up and down. He leaned into the window, looked into the back seat, and looked at my mother and me.

"Morning, ma'am."

"Good morning."

"Where you heading?"

"Salt Lake City."

"Purpose of your visit?"

"Visit my daughter."

"Citizenship?"

"Blackfoot," my mother told him.

"Ma'am?"

"Blackfoot," my mother repeated.

"Canadian?"

"Blackfoot."

It would have been easier if my mother had just said "Canadian" and been done with it, but I could see she wasn't going to do that. The guard wasn't angry or anything. He smiled and looked towards the building. Then he turned back and nodded.

"Morning, ma'am."

"Good morning."

"Any firearms or tobacco?"

"No."

"Citizenship?"

"Blackfoot."

He told us to sit in the car and wait, and we did. In about five minutes, another guard came out with the first man. They were talking as they came, both men swaying back and forth like two cowhands headed for a bar or a gunfight.

"Morning, ma'am."

"Good morning."

"Cecil tells me you and the boy are Blackfoot."

"That's right."

"Now, I know that we got Blackfeet on the American side and the



Canadians got Blackfeet on their side. Just so we can keep our records straight, what side do you come from?"

I knew exactly what my mother was going to say, and I could have told them if they had asked me.

"Canadian side or American side?" asked the guard.

"Blackfoot side," she said.

It didn't take them long to lose their sense of humour, I can tell you that. The one guard stopped smiling altogether and told us to park our car at the side of the building and come in.

We sat on a wood bench for about an hour before anyone came over to talk to us. This time it was a woman. She had a gun, too.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Inspector Pratt. I understand there is a little misunderstanding."

"I'm going to visit my daughter in Salt Lake City," my mother told her. "We don't have any guns or beer."

"It's a legal technicality, that's all."

"My daughter's Blackfoot, too."

The woman opened a briefcase and took out a couple of forms and began to write on one of them. "Everyone who crosses our border has to declare their citizenship. Even Americans. It helps us keep track of the visitors we get from the various countries."

She went on like that for maybe fifteen minutes, and a lot of the stuff she told us was interesting.

"I can understand how you feel about having to tell us your citizenship, and here's what I'll do. You tell me, and I won't put it down on the form. No one will know but you and me."

Her gun was silver. There were several chips in the wood handle and the name "Stella" was scratched into the metal butt.

We were in the border office for about four hours, and we talked to almost everyone there. One of the men bought me a Coke. My mother brought a couple of sandwiches in from the car. I offered part of mine to Stella, but she said she wasn't hungry.

I told Stella that we were Blackfoot and Canadian, but she said that didn't count because I was a minor. In the end, she told us that if my mother didn't declare her citizenship, we would have to go back to where we came from. My mother stood up and thanked Stella for her time. Then we got back in the car and drove to the Canadian border, which was only about ninety metres away.

I was disappointed. I hadn't seen Laetitia for a long time, and I had never been to Salt Lake City.

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When she was still at home, Laetitia would go on and on about Salt Lake City. She had never been there, but her boyfriend Lester Tallbull had spent a year in Salt Lake at a technical school.

"It's a great place," Lester would say. "Nothing but blondes in the whole state."

Whenever he said that, Laetitia would slug him on his shoulder hard enough to make him flinch. He had some brochures on Salt Lake and some maps, and every so often the two of them would spread them out on the table.

"That's the temple. It's right downtown. You got to have a pass to get in."

"Charlotte says anyone can go in and look around."

"When was Charlotte in Salt Lake? Just when was Charlotte in Salt Lake?"

"Last year."

"This is Liberty Park. It's got a zoo. There's good skiing in the mountains."

"Got all the skiing we can use," my mother would say. "People come from all over the world to ski at Banff. Cardston's got a temple, if you like those kinds of things."

"Oh, this one is real big," Lester would say. "They got armed guards and everything."

"Not what Charlotte says."

"What does she know?"

Lester and Laetitia broke up, but I guess the idea of Salt Lake stuck in her mind.

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The Canadian border guard was a young woman, and she seemed happy to see us. "Hi," she said. "You folks sure have a great day for a trip. Where are you coming from?"

"Stand-off."

"Is that in Montana?"

"No."

"Where are you going?"

"Stand-off."

The woman's name was Carol and I don't guess she was any older than Laetitia. "Wow, you both Canadians?"

"Blackfoot."

"Really? I have a friend I went to school with who is Blackfoot. Do you know Mike Harley?"

"No."

"He went to school in Lethbridge, but he's really from Browning."

It was a nice conversation and there were no cars behind us, so there was no rush.

"You're not bringing any liquor back, are you?"

"No."

"Any cigarettes or plants or stuff like that?"

"No."

"Citizenship?"

"Blackfoot."

"I know," said the woman, "and I'd be proud of being Blackfoot if I were Blackfoot. But you have to be American or Canadian."

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When Laetitia and Lester broke up, Lester took his brochures and maps with him, so Laetitia wrote to someone in Salt Lake City, and, about a month later, she got a big envelope of stuff. We sat at the table and opened up all the brochures, and Laetitia read each one out loud.

"Salt Lake City is the gateway to some of the world's most magnificent skiing.

"Salt Lake City is the home of one of the newest professional basketball franchises, the Utah Jazz.

"The Great Salt Lake is one of the natural wonders of the world."

It was kind of exciting seeing all those colour brochures on the table and listening to Laetitia read all about how Salt Lake City was one of the best places in the entire world.

"That Salt Lake City place sounds too good to be true," my mother told her.

"It has everything."

"We got everything right here."

"It's boring here."

"People in Salt Lake City are probably sending away for brochures of Calgary and Lethbridge and Pincher Creek right now."

In the end, my mother would say that maybe Laetitia should go to Salt Lake City, and Laetitia would say that maybe she would.

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We parked the car to the side of the building and Carol led us into a small room on the second floor. I found a comfortable spot on the couch and flipped through some back issues of *Saturday Night* and *Alberta Report*.

When I woke up, my mother was just coming out of another office. She didn't say a word to me. I followed her down the stairs and out to the car.

I thought we were going home, but she turned the car around and drove back towards the American border, which made me think we were going to visit Laetitia in Salt Lake City after all. Instead she pulled into the parking lot of the duty-free store and stopped.

"We going to see Laetitia?"

"No."

"We going home?"

Pride is a good thing to have, you know. Laetitia had a lot of pride, and so did my mother. I figured that someday, I'd have it, too.

"So where are we going?"

Most of that day, we wandered around the duty-free store, which wasn't very large. The manager had a name tag with a tiny American flag on one side and a tiny Canadian flag on the other. His name was Mel. Toward evening, he began suggesting that we should be on our way. I told him we had nowhere to go, that neither the Americans nor the Canadians would let us in. He laughed at that and told us that we should buy something or leave.

The car was not very comfortable, but we did have all that food and it was April, so even if it did snow as it sometimes does on the prairies, we wouldn't freeze. The next morning my mother drove to the American border.

It was a different guard this time, but the questions were the same. We didn't spend as much time in the office as we had the day before. By noon, we were back at the Canadian border. By two we were back in the duty-free shop parking lot.

The second night in the car was not as much fun as the first, but my mother seemed in good spirits, and, all in all, it was as much an adventure as an inconvenience. There wasn't much food left and that was a problem, but we had lots of water as there was a faucet in the side of the duty-free shop.

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One Sunday, Laetitia and I were watching television. Mom was over at Mrs. Manyfingers's. Right in the middle of the program, Laetitia turned off the set and said she was going to Salt Lake City, that life around here was too boring. I had wanted to see the rest of the program and really didn't care if Laetitia went to Salt Lake City or not. When Mom got home, I told her what Laetitia had said.

What surprised me was how angry Laetitia got when she found out that I had told Mom.

"You got a big mouth."

"That's what you said."

"What I said is none of your business."

"I didn't say anything."

"Well, I'm going for sure, now."

That weekend, Laetitia packed her bags, and we drove her to the border.

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Mel turned out to be friendly. When he closed up for the night and found us still parked in the lot, he came over and asked us if our car was broken down or something. My mother thanked him for his concern and told him that we were fine, that things would get straightened out in the morning.

"You're kidding," said Mel. "You'd think they could handle the simple things."

"We got some apples and a banana," I said, "but we're all out of ham sandwiches."

"You know, you read about these things, but you just don't believe it. You just don't believe it."

"Hamburgers would be even better because they got more stuff for energy."

My mother slept in the back seat. I slept in the front because I was smaller and could lie under the steering wheel. Late that night, I heard my mother open the car door. I found her sitting on her blanket leaning against the bumper of the car.

"You see all those stars," she said. "When I was a little girl, my grandmother used to take me and my sisters out on the prairies and tell us stories about all the stars."

"Do you think Mel is going to bring us any hamburgers?"

"Every one of those stars has a story. You see that bunch of stars over there that look like a fish?"

"He didn't say no."

"Coyote went fishing, one day. That's how it all started." We sat out under the stars that night, and my mother told me all sorts of stories. She was serious about it, too. She'd tell them slow, repeating parts as she went, as if she expected me to remember each one.

Early the next morning, the television vans began to arrive, and guys in suits and women in dresses came trotting over to us, dragging microphones and cameras and lights behind them. One of the vans had a table set up with orange juice and sandwiches and fruit. It was for the crew, but when I told them we hadn't eaten for a while, a really skinny blonde woman told us we could eat as much as we wanted.

They mostly talked to my mother. Every so often one of the reporters would come over and ask me questions about how it felt to be without a

country. I told them we had a nice house on the reserve and that my cousins had a couple of horses we rode when we went fishing. Some of the television people went over to the American border, and then they went to the Canadian border.

Around noon, a good-looking guy in a dark blue suit and an orange tie with little ducks on it drove up in a fancy car. He talked to my mother for a while, and, after they were done talking, my mother called me over, and we got into our car. Just as my mother started the engine, Mel came over and gave us a bag of peanut brittle and told us that justice was a hard thing to get, but that we shouldn't give up.

I would have preferred lemon drops, but it was nice of Mel anyway.

"Where are we going now?"

"Going to visit Laetitia."

The guard who came out to our car was all smiles. The television lights were so bright they hurt my eyes, and, if you tried to look through the windshield in certain directions, you couldn't see a thing.

"Morning, ma'am."

"Good morning."

"Where you heading?"

"Salt Lake City."

"Purpose of your visit?"

"Visit my daughter."

"Any tobacco, liquor, or firearms?"

"Don't smoke."

"Any plants or fruit?"

"Not any more."

"Citizenship?"

"Blackfoot."

The guard rocked back on his heels and jammed his thumbs into his gun belt. "Thank you," he said, his fingers patting the butt of the revolver. "Have a pleasant trip."

My mother rolled the car forward, and the television people had to scramble out of the way. They ran alongside the car as we pulled away from the border, and, when they couldn't run any farther, they stood in the middle of the highway and waved and waved and waved.

We got to Salt Lake City the next day. Laetitia was happy to see us, and, that first night, she took us out to a restaurant that made really good soups. The list of pies took up a whole page. I had cherry. Mom had chocolate. Laetitia said that she saw us on television the night before and, during the meal, she had us tell her the story over and over again.

Laetitia took us everywhere. We went to a fancy ski resort. We went to the temple. We got to go shopping in a couple of large malls, but they weren't as large as the one in Edmonton, and Mom said so.

After a week or so, I got bored and wasn't at all sad when my mother said we should be heading back home. Laetitia wanted us to stay longer, but Mom said no, that she had things to do back home and that, next time, Laetitia should come up and visit. Laetitia said she was thinking about moving back, and Mom told her to do as she pleased, and Laetitia said that she would.

On the way home, we stopped at the duty-free shop, and my mother gave Mel a green hat that said "Salt Lake" across the front. Mel was a funny guy. He took the hat and blew his nose and told my mother that she was an inspiration to us all. He gave us some more peanut brittle and came out into the parking lot and waved at us all the way to the Canadian border.

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It was almost evening when we left Coutts. I watched the border through the rear window until all you could see were the tops of the flagpoles and the blue water tower, and then they rolled over a hill and disappeared.

1. RESPONDING TO THE STORY

- a. Why is not stating her nationality such an important issue for Laetitia's mother?
- b. Do you think the mother did the right thing in not telling the border guards what they wanted to hear? Explain fully.

2. ORAL LANGUAGE RETELL THE STORY

Thomas King tells part of the story in **flashback**. Flashbacks can help explain the plot to the reader. Discuss the events, and make notes about the flashbacks. Retell the story in chronological order. What difference do you think that makes to the story?

A **flashback** describes an earlier event in a story.

3. WRITING DEVELOP CHARACTERS

Characterization is the way the author describes the characters. The mother in "Borders" could be described as a multidimensional character. King has presented her in a realistic way and there are many different aspects to her character. By the end of the story, readers may feel that they really know and understand her. Flat characters are much simpler. The author presents the character with only one or two traits.

- Develop a character sketch for the mother in the story. For each trait, provide at least one detail from the story that illustrates it. You might begin by thinking of adjectives that you feel describe her.
- Identify and describe at least one flat character in this story. What is the author's purpose in showing these characters in this way?

STRATEGIES

4. EDITOR'S DESK COMPLEX SENTENCES

In "Borders," Thomas King uses a variety of simple sentences and complex sentences. A story that is full of simple sentences tends to be choppy and annoying to read. Using different types of sentences helps to create variety and keeps the reader interested. For example:

They ran alongside the car as we pulled away from the border, and, when they couldn't run any farther, they stood in the middle of the highway and waved and waved and waved.

When you edit your next written work, add variety by turning simple sentences into complex sentences so that you have a balance.

VOCABULARY

foray: excursion for the purpose of raiding

honing: sharpening

regime: a system of government or rule

Vocabulary Tip

Use a variety of clues to predict the meaning of a new word. For example, the word *honing* can be figured out when you read on and realize that the narrator is a barber.

Understanding Short Stories

Some short stories begin in the middle of the action to capture the reader's attention. What do you think has already happened? As you read on, look for further clues about what has already happened.

Understanding Short Stories

The point of view can support the tone of the short story. A first-person point of view can be very personal and emotional. Look for clues about how the barber is telling. What do you know about his story?

What do you think?

When has choosing between right and wrong led you to a turning point in your life?

LATHER AND NOTHING ELSE

Short Story by Hernando Téllez

He came in without a word. I was stropping my best razor. And when I recognized him, I started to shake. But he did not notice. To cover my nervousness, I went on honing the razor. I tried the edge with the tip of my thumb and took another look at it against the light.

Meanwhile, he was taking off his cartridge-studded belt with the pistol holster suspended from it. He put it on a hook in the wardrobe and hung his cap above it. Then he turned full around toward me and, loosening his tie, remarked, "It's hot as the devil. I want a shave." With that he took his seat.

I estimated he had a four days' growth of beard, the four days he had been gone on the last foray after our men. His face looked burnt, tanned by the sun.

I started to work carefully on the shaving soap. I scraped some slices from the cake, dropped them into the mug, then added a little lukewarm water, and stirred with the brush. The lather soon began to rise.

"The fellows in the troop must have just about as much beard as I." I went on stirring up lather. "But we did very well, you know. We caught the leaders. Some of them we brought back dead; others are still alive. But they'll all be dead soon."

"How many did you take?" I asked.

"Fourteen. We had to go pretty far in to find them. But now they're paying for it. And not one will escape; not a single one."

He leaned back in the chair when he saw the brush in my hand, full of lather. I had not yet put the sheet on him. I was certainly flustered. Taking a sheet from the drawer, I tied it around my customer's neck.

He went on talking. He evidently took it for granted that I was on the side of the existing regime.

"The people must have gotten a scare with what happened the other day," he said.

"Yes," I replied, as I finished tying the knot against his nape, which smelt of sweat.

"Good show, wasn't it?"

"Very good," I answered, turning my attention now to the brush. The man closed his eyes wearily and awaited the cool caress of the lather.

I had never had him so close before. The day he ordered the people to file through the schoolyard to look upon the four rebels hanging there, my path had crossed his briefly.

But the sight of those mutilated bodies kept me from paying attention to the face of the man who had been directing it all and whom I now had in my hands.

It was not a disagreeable face, certainly. And the beard, which aged him a bit, was not unbecoming. His name was Torres. Captain Torres.

I started to lay on the first coat of lather. He kept his eyes closed.

"I would love to catch a nap," he said, "but there's a lot to be done this evening."

I lifted the brush and asked, with pretended indifference: "A firing party?"

"Something of the sort," he replied, "but slower."

"All of them?"

"No, just a few."

Understanding Short Stories

Authors use suspense to keep readers reading. What do you think the barber wants to do? What do you think he will do?



Understanding Short Stories

Setting involves location (time and place) but also all of the description that builds atmosphere. What aspects of the setting has the author focused on? How has the author used effective word choice to create a realistic barbershop setting?

Understanding Short Stories

Distinctive dialogue and effective word choice can bring characters to life. Has the author established a clear voice for each character? Explain.

I went on lathering his face. My hands began to tremble again. The man could not be aware of this, which was lucky for me. But I wished he had not come in. Probably many of our men had seen him enter the shop. And with the enemy in my house I felt a certain responsibility.

I would have to shave his beard just like any other, carefully, neatly, just as though he were a good customer, taking heed that not a single pore should emit a drop of blood. Seeing to it that the blade did not slip in the small whorls. Taking care that the skin was left clean, soft, shining, so that when I passed the back of my hand over it not a single hair should be felt. Yes. I was secretly a revolutionary, but at the same time I was a conscientious barber, proud of the way I did my job. And that four-day beard presented a challenge.

I took up the razor, opened the handle wide, releasing the blade, and started to work, downward from one sideburn. The blade responded to perfection. The hair was tough and hard; not very long, but thick. Little by little the skin began to show through. The razor gave its usual sound as it gathered up layers of soap mixed with bits of hair. I paused to wipe it clean, and taking up the strop once more went about improving its edge, for I am a painstaking barber.

The man, who had kept his eyes closed, now opened them, put a hand out from under the sheet, felt the part of his face that was emerging from the lather, and said to me, "Come at six o'clock this evening to the school."

"Will it be like the other day?" I asked, stiff with horror.

"It may be even better," he replied.

"What are you planning to do?"

"I'm not sure yet. But we'll have a good time."

Once more he leaned back and shut his eyes. I came closer, the razor on high.

"Are you going to punish all of them?" I timidly ventured.

"Yes, all of them."

The lather was drying on his face. I must hurry. Through the mirror, I took a look at the street. It appeared about as usual; there was the grocery shop with two or three customers. Then I glanced at the clock, two-thirty.

The razor kept descending. Now from the other sideburn downward. It was a blue beard, a thick one. He should let it grow like some poets, or some priests. It would suit him well. Many people would not recognize him. And that would be a good thing for him, I thought, as I went gently over all the throat line. At this point you really had to handle your blade skillfully, because the hair, while scantier, tended to fall into small whorls. It was a curly beard. The pores might open, minutely, in this area and let out a tiny drop of blood. A good barber like myself stakes his reputation on not permitting that to happen to any of his customers.

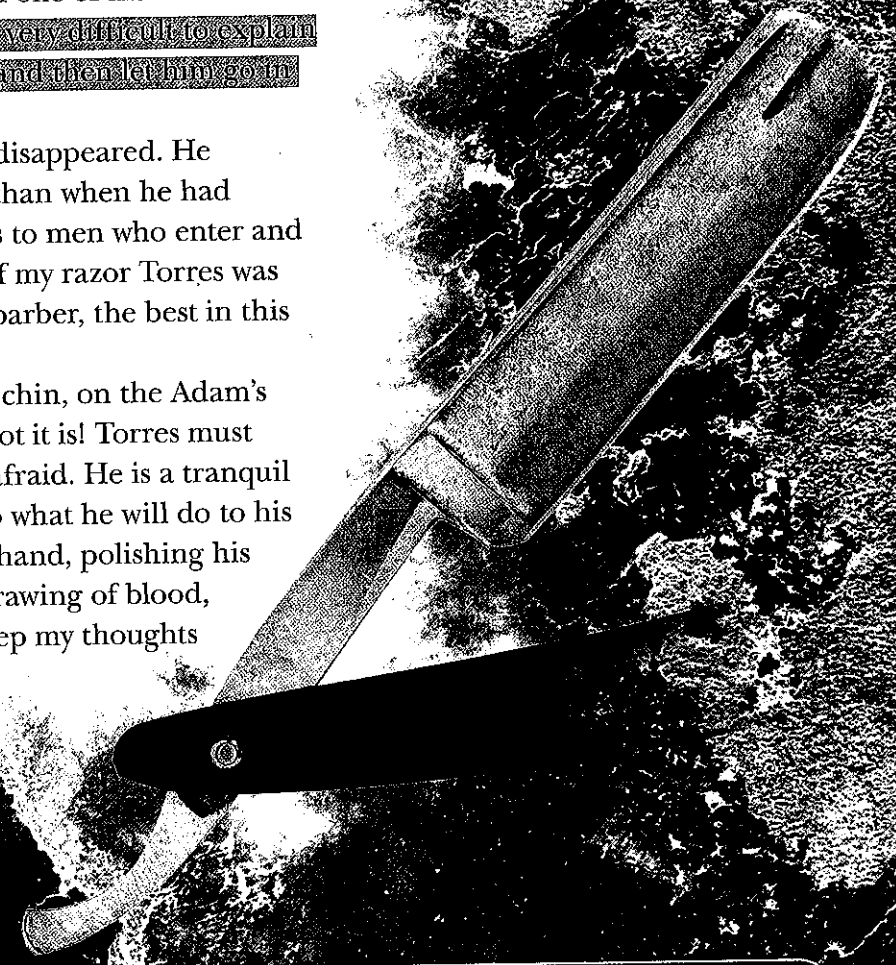
And this was indeed a special customer. **How many of ours had he sent to their death?** How many had he mutilated? It was best not to think about it. Torres did not know I was his enemy. Neither he nor the others knew it. It was a secret shared by very few, just because that made it possible for me to inform the revolutionaries about Torres's activities in the town and what he planned to do every time he went on one of his raids to hunt down rebels. **So it was going to be very difficult to explain how it was that I had him in my hands and then let him go in peace, alive, clean-shaven.**

His beard had now almost entirely disappeared. He looked younger, several years younger than when he had come in. I suppose that always happens to men who enter and leave barbershops. Under the strokes of my razor Torres was rejuvenated; yes, because I am a good barber, the best in this town, and I say this in all modesty.

A little more lather here under the chin, on the Adam's apple, right near the great vein. How hot it is! Torres must be sweating just as I am. But he is not afraid. He is a tranquil man, who is not even giving thought to what he will do to his prisoners this evening. I, on the other hand, polishing his skin with this razor but avoiding the drawing of blood, careful with every stroke—I cannot keep my thoughts in order.

← Understanding Short Stories

Conflict helps move a story along and makes it interesting. What are the conflicts at the heart of this story?



Understanding Short Stories →

Authors can reveal information about a character in several ways. What does this author reveal about the barber's personality here? How has he revealed it?

Confound the hour he entered my shop! **Am I a revolutionary but not a murderer?** And it would be so easy to kill him. He deserves it. Or does he? No! **No one deserves the sacrifice others make in becoming assassins. What is to be gained by it?** Nothing. Others and still others keep coming, and the first kill the second, and then these kill the next, and so on until everything becomes a sea of blood. I could cut his throat, so, swish, swish! He would not even have time to moan, and with his eyes shut he would not even see the shine of the razor or the gleam in my eye.

But I'm shaking like a regular murderer. From his throat a stream of blood would flow on the sheet, over the chair, down on my hands, onto the floor. I would have to close the door. But the blood would go flowing along the floor, warm, indelible, not to be staunched, until it reached the street like a small scarlet river.

I'm sure that with a good strong blow, a deep cut, he would feel no pain. He would not suffer at all. And what would I do then with the body? Where would I hide it? I would have to flee, leave all this behind, take shelter far away, very far away. But they would follow until they caught up with me. "The murderer of Captain Torres. He slit his throat while he was shaving him. What a cowardly thing to do!"

And others would say, "The avenger of our people. A name to remember"—my name here. "He was the town barber. No one knew he was fighting for our cause."

And so which will it be: Murderer or hero? My fate hangs on the edge of this razor blade.

I can turn my wrist slightly, put a bit more pressure on the blade, let it sink in. The skin will yield like silk, like rubber, like the strop. There is nothing more tender than a man's skin, and the blood is always there, ready to burst forth. A razor like this cannot fail. It is the best one I have.

Understanding Short Stories →

The plot of a short story usually has one problem that has to be solved. Finding the solution to that problem occurs during the rising action of the plot. What is the problem in this story? How do you think that problem will be resolved?

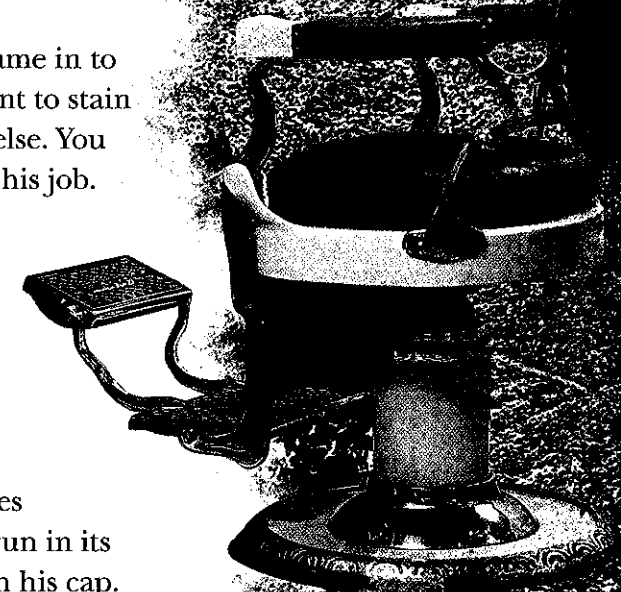
But I don't want to be a murderer. No, sir. You came in to be shaved. And I do my work honourably. I don't want to stain my hands with blood. Just with lather, and nothing else. You are an executioner; I am only a barber. Each one to his job. That's it. Each one to his job.

The chin was now clean, polished, soft. The man got up and looked at himself in the glass. He ran his hand over the skin and felt its freshness, its newness.

"Thanks," he said. He walked to the wardrobe for his belt, his pistol, and his cap. I must have been very pale, and I felt my shirt soaked with sweat. Torres finished adjusting his belt buckle, straightened his gun in its holster and, smoothing his hair mechanically, put on his cap. From his trousers pocket he took some coins to pay for the shave. And he started toward the door. On the threshold he stopped for a moment and, turning toward me, he said, "They told me you would kill me. I came to find out if it was true. But it's not easy to kill. I know what I'm talking about."

Understanding Short Stories

The elements of a short story should work together to communicate the author's theme. What message is Hernando Téllez sending? How does he make his message clear?



eBook

Responding

What Do You Think Now? When has choosing between right and wrong led you to a turning point in your life? How do you think the barber would respond to this question? How do you think Captain Torres would respond?

Understanding Short Stories: Is the first-person point of view an effective choice for this story? Find evidence in the text to support your answer.

Drawing Conclusions: How does the author intend us to feel about Captain Torres? Find evidence in the text to support your answer.

Critical Thinking: Did the barber do the right thing? Why or why not? How did the barber decide what he was going to do?

Evaluating: Would the phrase from the last paragraph of the story, "It's not easy to kill," have been a better title for the story? Why or why not? How might it have changed the theme of the story?

Metacognition: How does analyzing the writing of others help you to improve your own writing? What did you learn from this story that you might try in your own story writing?

VOCABULARY

persona: a character or personality that a person adopts and presents to the public

Vocabulary Tip

If you don't recognize a word, it often helps to think of other words that have the same base. The word *persona*, for example, is related to *person*, *personal*, and *personality*. *Persona* is a personality that you present to the public.

What do you think?

When you follow all the rules, you're better able to control the direction your life takes.

Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5

THE CAKE PRINCESS

Short Story by Mar'ce Merrell

My mother hates cake. The frosting is sickeningly sweet, she always rants, the layers nothing but fat and eggs and more sugar. "Enough to make your heart stop beating before you put your napkin down," she tells my dad.

"That's what makes it taste good," my dad always answers. He loves cake and it loves him. "Chantal." He waves his fork at me. "Have another piece."

"One's my limit," I always answer. Not because I don't want another one. More because I feel my mother's eyes on me, sense the pause in her actions until I respond.

I live by the rules my mother sets out. No eating after 7 p.m. All red meat will kill you. Lay out your clothes the night before. Make your bed as soon as you get out of it. A cold-water rinse makes your hair shiny. TV-watching rots your brain. Only loose girls go to parties. Cyberspace was created by perverts. Don't talk to strangers.

My days are routine and scheduled, yet stressful because the rules never factor in piles of homework that keep me up until 2 a.m. and exhaust me. How can you have a social life if you don't go on the Internet or talk to people you don't know? Rebellion has crept into my habits. Now, in my senior year of high school, I'm Food TV Network-obsessed and a regular Facebook user, and I've gone to three parties.

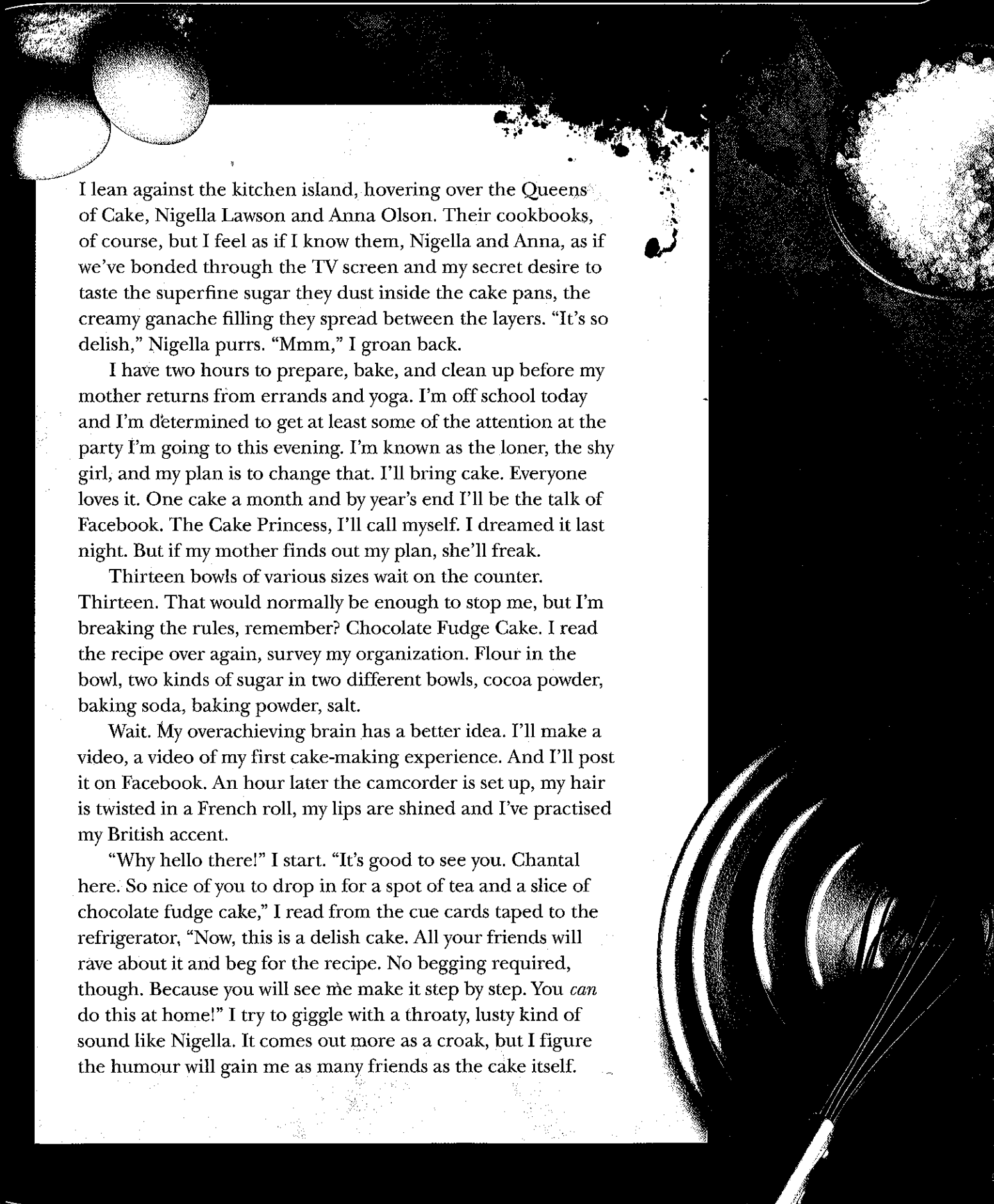
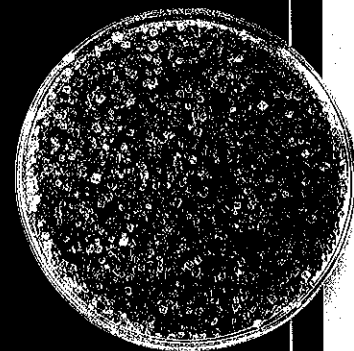
I lean against the kitchen island, hovering over the Queens of Cake, Nigella Lawson and Anna Olson. Their cookbooks, of course, but I feel as if I know them, Nigella and Anna, as if we've bonded through the TV screen and my secret desire to taste the superfine sugar they dust inside the cake pans, the creamy ganache filling they spread between the layers. "It's so delish," Nigella purrs. "Mmm," I groan back.

I have two hours to prepare, bake, and clean up before my mother returns from errands and yoga. I'm off school today and I'm determined to get at least some of the attention at the party I'm going to this evening. I'm known as the loner, the shy girl, and my plan is to change that. I'll bring cake. Everyone loves it. One cake a month and by year's end I'll be the talk of Facebook. The Cake Princess, I'll call myself. I dreamed it last night. But if my mother finds out my plan, she'll freak.

Thirteen bowls of various sizes wait on the counter. Thirteen. That would normally be enough to stop me, but I'm breaking the rules, remember? Chocolate Fudge Cake. I read the recipe over again, survey my organization. Flour in the bowl, two kinds of sugar in two different bowls, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder, salt.

Wait. My overachieving brain has a better idea. I'll make a video, a video of my first cake-making experience. And I'll post it on Facebook. An hour later the camcorder is set up, my hair is twisted in a French roll, my lips are shined and I've practised my British accent.

"Why hello there!" I start. "It's good to see you. Chantal here. So nice of you to drop in for a spot of tea and a slice of chocolate fudge cake," I read from the cue cards taped to the refrigerator, "Now, this is a delish cake. All your friends will rave about it and beg for the recipe. No begging required, though. Because you will see me make it step by step. You *can* do this at home!" I try to giggle with a throaty, lusty kind of sound like Nigella. It comes out more as a croak, but I figure the humour will gain me as many friends as the cake itself.



"Now then, first step, combine the dry ingredients." I lift bowls toward the camera, show their contents and dump them out into the large stainless steel bowl in front of me.

"Next, we're going to whisk these wonderful cholesterol-laden eggs with ..." I lean forward to squint at the cue cards. "Sour cream, the full-fat variety of course, because no one wants to skimp on taste, and then vanilla. Real Madagascar vanilla." I whisk and whisk, wondering aloud how much is enough.

I never hear the door open, the click of my mother's heels on the wooden slats of the kitchen floor. "What are you doing?" She's astounded. I've shaken her foundation of expectations.

"Uh ... uh ..." I drop the whisk in the bowl. "I'm making a cake. For some friends. It's one of the girls' birthdays." I rip a paper towel from the roll, race to clean up the drips of chocolate. "I'm just making it."

"What's that?" She points to the camcorder.

The camcorder! I'll have to edit a whole long bit out.

"I'm filming. It's part of the gift."

"Oh." She nods and drifts toward the counter stool, just out of the frame. "You can keep on going. I need to rest a minute." She slumps in the chair, breaking one of her favourite rules: a correct posture conveys confidence and leads to a flat stomach with little effort.

"Are you sure?" I knew something was wrong, but we don't talk about things that are wrong, unless it's something wrong with me.

"Go ahead."

I continue, trying but failing to get back my British accent.

"And now we are at our final step prior to baking, combining the dry and the wet ingredients. You don't want to overmix, or all that lovely fat and sugar and cholesterol will have gone to waste instead of to your waist." I giggle, and I think I hear my mother choke back a favourable response.

I pour the rich chocolatey batter into the tins. "There you have it. Two layers of yummy. I'll take a break while I put these in the oven and prepare to make the gooey-goodness frosting." I smile into the camera as I get close enough to push the pause button. I slide the cake pans into the oven.

"Where did you learn to bake?" My mother leans her chin into her upturned hand.

"Food TV and cookbooks."

"And how long have you been making cakes?"

"This is the first one." I can't help my voice from shaking. There is something wrong with her. Why hasn't she exploded? Told me how I've disappointed her?

"What other secrets will I find out, I wonder." She folds her arms on the counter in front of her, slow to surrender, and lays her forehead against her forearms. I watch as she cries, her shoulders shaking.

"Mom? Mom!"

"Don't talk to me."

"Please. Don't do this." I try to keep my concern for her in the front of my head, but I can't. What makes her think this is OK? She is wrecking my whole project. The project to become me. Because life is all about her. Her rules. All I do is make one cake and it's enough to send her into crying fits. "Mom. Stop it." My voice is level, but barely.

She keeps crying as if she hasn't even heard me.

"You wreck everything." I pick up the thirteen empty bowls and toss them into the sink, letting them strike hard, chip, break in half. I don't care. If she can wreck my life, I'll wreck something of hers.

"Chantal." Her face is still buried in her arms.

"Don't tell me what to do. Or what I'm doing wrong." I throw the wooden spoon at the refrigerator, just missing the camcorder. A brown blob of batter sticks to the stainless steel.

"I'm hungry." Her voice comes out as a whine.

"You're hungry?" I set down the glass measuring cup I am about to fling against the wall. "You're crying because you're hungry?"

"I ... I ... yes ... I'm hungry." Her red-rimmed eyes plead with me to forgive her.

"Do you want a grilled cheese? Or a peanut butter and banana sandwich?" The only two things I can make reliably.

"A grilled peanut butter and banana sandwich. Butter the bread."

"Mom?" Butter? Grilled? Peanut butter? "What's wrong?"

"Some days, Chantal, you get a dose of reality and you think, I've been wasting my time. Today I'm going to eat a peanut butter and banana sandwich while I watch you make a TV show and bake a cake. That's OK, isn't it?" Her eyes challenge me to defy her.

Baking Book

"It's great. Great." What else can I say or do? I know all about reality checks. I am in the middle of one. I slather two pieces of bread with butter, layer peanut butter and sliced bananas between them and fry them to golden and crispy edges. My mother moans as she eats. My Mother. Moans. "Delish?" I ask.

"Delish." She licks a dribble of melted peanut butter from her bottom lip. "Perfect."

She sits at the counter, commenting on my accent and my whisking skills as I whip together the icing: melted dark chocolate, unsalted butter, icing sugar, and vanilla.

"And now for the taste test." I dig my forefinger into the bowl, twirl it and hold it up to the camera. Before I can reach it to my lips, my mother grabs my hand and in one motion, pulls it to her mouth and licks off my finger. "Mom!"

She laughs. Laughs! Who is the woman who's invaded my mother's body?

I spread the frosting on the top layer.

"How does it look?" I ask as I sit down on the stool next to my mother.

"Delish." The word comes out sad though.

"Mom, what's going on? You're acting strange. Please don't keep secrets."

"It's nothing you need to be worried about." She runs her hand through her hair, stopping to tuck strands into the bun.

"I am worried. Now, tell me. I'm almost eighteen. I bake cakes. I watch TV. I go on the Internet. And I talk to strangers at parties. Whatever you tell me, I can handle it." I stare her down, the way she always does me. She doesn't look away. Maybe when she saw how I'd become her, she decided to give me a chance.

"I've got cancer. Ovarian. I didn't want to tell you, but your dad said he would tell you tonight if I didn't."

"Mom." I rub my hand over her back. Ovarian cancer? Was it worse or better than breast cancer? If they don't have runs for the cure and pink things for sale, does that mean you won't die? That she won't die? "You'll get treatment. Right?"

"They're going to do surgery." Her voice quivers.

"Mom." I hold my breath to stop the rush of tears that threatens. She will be fine.

"I am such a fool."

"What? You didn't do anything to get cancer. Don't." I sigh. Again. She is always the martyr.

"No. I'm a fool because I thought that if I did all the right things, nothing bad would happen. And it has."

"But, eating right is a good—"

"It's stupid if you are constantly starving, wishing you could eat something." She reaches out, runs her finger along the bottom edge of my cake. My cake. Chocolate fudge. The scoop of icing on her finger is at least a tablespoon. She shoves it into her mouth, plays with it against her tongue and the roof of her mouth. Moans as it slides down her throat.

"You're right. It is stupid." I follow her lead and let my finger race across the top of the cake.

She tells me about the planned surgery and her treatments, about how her doctor is the best in the city, about how everything is going to be OK. I believe what she says, because that's what you do when someone you love tells you they have a disease that could kill them.



"So why did you bake a cake today?" she asks as we pull chunks off with our fingers. We never even consider a knife. We smush pieces into each other's mouths, lick frosting off our fingers.

"It's part of my new persona," I say, all my defences down now that the secrets are flowing. "I'm going to be known as The Cake Princess."

"The Cake Princess," she says. "Delish."

Responding

What Do You Think Now? "When you follow all the rules, you're better able to control the direction your life takes." How do you respond to this statement now that you've read the story?

Analyzing Short Stories: How does the author use dialogue effectively to develop her characters?

Find examples from the text to support your answer.

Making Inferences: What do cakes and baking represent to Chantal? Why does Chantal's mother feel the need to have so many titles for herself and her daughter?

Critical Literacy: What stereotypes does Chantal's mother believe about young people? Has her attitude changed at the end of the story? Explain.

Evaluating: Does the final line of the story bring it to a satisfying conclusion? What did or didn't you like about the ending of the story?

Metacognition: What elements of short stories helped you understand and respond to this story?

eBook Extra

