COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

A Kenyan Teen's Discovery: Let There Be Lights To Save Lions

By Nina Gregory
2013

Kenya is a country in East Africa with a population of around 45 million people. The capital city, Nairobi, is well-known for its National Park: the world's only game reserve[1] found within a major city. The park's large wildlife population includes baboons, rhinos, gazelles, zebras, cheetahs, and many other species. Though many efforts have been made to protect lions in the area, when lions kill off local livestock, some residents respond by killing the big cats. As you read, take notes on how Turere describes the process that led to his innovation.

[1] One of the talks from the TED[2] stage in Long Beach, Calif., this week came from Richard Turere, an inventor. He is a Maasai[3] from Kenya. And he's 13.



"Lion - Panthera leo, Nairobi National Park" by Peter Steward is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

"From ages 6 to 9, I started looking after my father's cows," Richard says. "I'd take them out in the morning and bring them back in the evening. We put them in a small cow shed at night," and that's when the trouble would start. Lions would jump in the shed and kill the cows, which are enclosed and an easy target.

Lions are the top tourist attraction to Kenya, especially in the Nairobi National Park, which is near where Richard lives. Lions are also considered critically[4] endangered in Kenya.

The Kenya Wildlife Service estimates there are just 2,000 lions left in the country. One of the main causes of their demise, "is that people kill them in retaliation[5] for lions attacking their livestock," says Paula Kahumbu, executive director of Wildlife Direct, a wildlife conservation organization in Africa.

[5] She has been studying the conflict between humans and lions, and her work led her to Richard. In one week, she monitored[6] over 50 cases where lions attacked livestock. "It's a very, very serious problem," she says.

Her work studying the problem led her to Richard.

1. a large area of land where wild animals are protected from overhunting by humans
2. TED is a non-profit organization devoted to spreading ideas, often through their short and highly influential "talks," referred to as "TED talks." TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design; the organization began as a conference that covered those topics.
3. The Maasai are an ethnic group inhabiting southern Kenya and northern Tanzania.
4. **Critical** ***(adjective):*** demanding serious attention
5. **Retaliation** ***(noun):*** an act of revenge
6. **Monitor** ***(verb):*** to watch, observe, or check something over a period of time

One night he was walking around with a flashlight and discovered the lions were scared of a moving light. A light went on inside him and an idea was born.

Three weeks and much tinkering later, Richard had invented a system of lights that flash around the cow shed, mimicking[7] a human walking around with a flashlight. His system is made from broken flashlight parts and an indicator box from a motorcycle.

"The only thing I bought was a solar panel,"[8] which charges a battery that supplies power to the lights at night, Richard says. He calls the system Lion Lights.

[10] "There have been a lot of efforts to try to protect the lions," Kahumbu says. "It's a crisis and everyone is looking for a solution. One idea was land leases, another was lion-proof fences. And basically no one even knew that Richard had already come up with something that worked."

His simple solution was so successful, his neighbors heard about it and wanted Lion Lights, too. He installed the lights for them and for six other homes in his community. From there, the lights spread and are now being used all around Kenya. Someone in India is trying them out for tigers. In Zambia and Tanzania they're being used, as well.

To get to the TED stage, Richard traveled on an airplane for the first time in his life. He says he has a lot to tell his friends about when he goes back home, and among the scholars and prize winners, scientists and poets, what impressed him the most on his trip was something he saw at the nearby Aquarium of the Pacific: "It was my first time seeing a shark. I've never seen a shark."

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7. **Mimic** ***(verb):*** to imitate or appear similar to something else
8. A solar panel absorbs energy from the sun and generates electricity or heat.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies the central idea of the article?
    A. Before Richard Turere's invention attracted widespread attention, animal rights activists and local farmers in Kenya had given up on solving the lion crisis.
    B. Richard Turere was inspired to build his invention by the work he had seen presented at past technology conferences.
    C. Richard Turere developed a way to protect both livestock and lions with his invention, Lion Lights, which was more effective than many other complicated solutions.
    D. The greatest danger faced by lions in Kenya today comes from humans who hunt lions as payback for trespassing on their property and threatening their farm animals.

2. PART B: Which phrase from the text best support the answers to Part A?
    A. "Lions would jump in the shed and kill the cows, which are enclosed and an easy target." (Paragraph 2)
    B. "She has been studying the conflict between humans and lions, and her work led her to Richard." (Paragraph 5)
    C. "'It's a crisis and everyone is looking for a solution.'" (Paragraph 10)
    D. "His simple solution was so successful, his neighbors heard about it and wanted Lion Lights, too." (Paragraph 11)

3. PART A: Which statement best describes the relationship between livestock owners and lions?
    A. Livestock owners want the lions to all die or become extinct so that they no longer have to worry about their livestock being attacked.
    B. Livestock owners have retaliated against lions in the past, but in general, they want to find a way to protect their livestock that does not involve killing the lions.
    C. Livestock owners want to get rid of the Nairobi National Park so that lions will be removed along with the park and will no longer attack local farmers' livestock.
    D. Livestock owners want a complete lion-proof fence around Nairobi National Park to stop lions from wandering off and attacking livestock.

4. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "Lions are the top tourist attraction to Kenya, especially in the Nairobi National Park… Lions are also considered critically endangered in Kenya." (Paragraph 3)
    B. "One of the main causes of their demise, 'is that people kill them in retaliation for lions attacking their livestock,' says Paula Kahumbu" (Paragraph 4)
    C. "'There have been a lot of efforts to try to protect the lions,' Kahumbu says. 'It's a crisis and everyone is looking for a solution.'" (Paragraph 10)
    D. "One idea was land leases, another was lion-proof fences." (Paragraph 10)

5. What is the author's main purpose in writing this piece? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Why do you think Richard emphasizes that the only thing he bought was a solar panel? Is there something impressive about successfully working with limited materials? Can you think of a problem in your community that a simple piece of technology might solve?

2. What do you think about how lions are somehow both "the top tourist attraction to Kenya" but also "critically endangered"? Is this ironic? How can officials balance using the animals for tourism while helping them survive in the wild?

3. Whose job is it to protect wildlife? Should the burden fall on wildlife activist organizations or on the government? Is it important that individual citizens like Richard also do their part?

4. As described in the article, Richard's creativity led him to create an effective invention. In the context of this article, how do people create change? What can we learn from this article about achieving peace between people and the natural world? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

A Quick Note on Getting Better at Difficult Things

By Ta-Nehisi Coates
2015

Ta-Nehisi Coates is an American writer, journalist, and educator. Coates is a correspondent for The Atlantic *who often writes about cultural, social, and political issues, especially as they relate to African Americans. In this text, Coates discusses how to get better at difficult things and shares his own struggles learning a new skill. As you read, take note of the obstacles that the author encounters and how he overcomes them.*

[1] I have been studying the French language, with some consistency, for three years. This field of study has been, all at once, the hardest and most rewarding of my life. I would put it above the study of writing simply because I started writing as a 6-year-old boy under my mother's tutelage.[1] I always "felt" I could write. I did not always "feel" I could effectively study a foreign language.



"Learn French" by Leo Reynolds is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

But here I am, right now, in a Montreal hotel. I spoke French at the border. I spoke French when I checked in. I spoke French when I went to get lunch. I don't really believe in fluency.[2] If there is such a thing, I don't have it. I mishear words. I confuse tenses. I can't really use the subjunctive. Yet.

Something has happened to me and the something is this — I have gotten better. I don't know when I first felt it. I didn't feel it this summer at Middlebury,[3] despite the difference in my entrance and exit scores. I didn't feel it when I first arrived in Paris in January. I felt, as I always feel, like I was stumbling around in the dark. I still feel like that. But I also feel like I am getting better at stumbling.

I am emphasizing how I "feel" because, when studying, it is as important as any objective[4] reality. Hopelessness feeds the fatigue[5] that leads the student to quit. It is not the study of language that is hard, so much as the "feeling" that your present level is who you are and who you will always be. I remember returning from France at the end of the summer of 2013, and being convinced that I had some kind of brain injury which prevented me from hearing French vowel sounds. But the real enemy was not any injury so much as the "feeling" of despair. That is why I ignore all the research about children and their language advantage. I don't want to hear it. I just don't care. As Carolyn Forché would say — "I'm going to have it."

1. support
2. **Fluency** ***(noun):*** the ability to speak or write a foreign language easily and accurately
3. Middlebury College is located in Vermont. They offer a 6-week summer graduate school program for students who want to learn French. Students who attend must pledge to speak only French for the entire time they're there.
4. **Objective** ***(adjective):*** neutral
5. **Fatigue** ***(noun):*** extreme tiredness

[5] To “have it,” I must manage my emotional health. Part of that long-term management — beyond French — is giving myself an opportunity to get better at difficult things. There is absolutely nothing in this world like the feeling of sucking at something and then improving at it. Everyone should do it every ten years or so.

I don’t know what comes after this. I have said this before, and will say it again: Studying French is like setting in a canoe from California to China. You arrive on the coast of Hawaii and think, “Wow that was really far.” And then you realize that China is still so very far away. “Feelings” come and go. Likely, someone will say something — in the next hour or so — which I do not understand and I will feel a little hopeless again. But right now, I feel high. And one must savor those moments of feeling high, because they are not the norm. The lows are the norm. The Struggle is the norm. May it ever be thus.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
    A. It is important to accept and expect struggle when learning a new skill.
    B. It is likely you will never fully master a new skill, but it is the journey that is important.
    C. French is one of the hardest languages to learn, so people who attempt to learn it must be mentally tough.
    D. It is better to find something that you excel at, rather than struggle with something that doesn't come naturally.

2. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
    A. "I would put it above the study of writing simply because I started writing as a 6-year-old boy under my mother's tutelage. I always 'felt' I could write." (Paragraph 1)
    B. "I didn't feel it when I first arrived in Paris in January. I felt, as I always feel, like I was stumbling around in the dark. I still feel like that." (Paragraph 3)
    C. "To 'have it,' I must manage my emotional health. Part of that long-term management — beyond French — is giving myself an opportunity to get better at difficult things." (Paragraph 5)
    D. "Likely, someone will say something — in the next hour or so — which I do not understand and I will feel a little hopeless again. But right now, I feel high." (Paragraph 6)

3. PART A: What is the author's purpose in the text? [RI.6]
    A. to give people an example of how failure is a good thing
    B. to encourage people to keep working hard, even if something is difficult
    C. to prove that nothing can be rewarding if it's not challenging
    D. to urge people to learn a foreign language since that's a necessary skill in the 21st century

4. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
    A. "I spoke French at the border. I spoke French when I checked in. I spoke French when I went to get lunch." (Paragraph 2)
    B. "If there is a such thing, I don't have it. I mishear words. I confuse tenses. I can't really use the subjunctive. Yet." (Paragraph 2)
    C. "There is absolutely nothing in this world like the feeling of sucking at something and then improving at it." (Paragraph 5)
    D. "I have said this before, and will say it again: Studying French is like setting in a canoe from California to China." (Paragraph 6)

5. How does paragraph 4 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? [RI.5]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Have you ever tried something new that took you a long time to master? What were your experiences with it? Was trying it worth it in the end?

2. In the context of the text, why do people succeed? What does Ta-Nehisi Coates think is necessary in order to succeed at new skills? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

I Am Offering This Poem

By Jimmy Santiago Baca
1990

Jimmy Santiago Baca (b. 1952) is an award-winning American poet and writer, of Apache and Chicano descent. Following his difficult childhood, Baca was incarcerated as a young man. In prison, he taught himself to read and write. As you read, take notes on the meaning of the figurative language in the poem.



"Warming Hands" by Ricky Romero is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

I am offering this poem to you,
since I have nothing else to give.
Keep it like a warm coat
when winter comes to cover you,
or like a pair of thick socks
the cold cannot bite through,

I love you,

I have nothing else to give you,
so it is a pot full of yellow corn
to warm your belly in winter,
it is a scarf for your head, to wear
over your hair, to tie up around your face,

I love you,

Keep it, treasure this as you would
if you were lost, needing direction,
in the wilderness life becomes when mature;
and in the corner of your drawer,
tucked away like a cabin or hogan[1]
in dense[2] trees, come knocking,
and I will answer, give you directions,
and let you warm yourself by this fire,
rest by this fire, and make you feel safe

I love you,

It's all I have to give,
and all anyone needs to live,
and to go on living inside,
when the world outside
no longer cares if you live or die;
remember,

1. A hogan is a Navajo hut built with logs and earth, with its door traditionally facing east.
2. **Dense** ***(adjective):*** thickly crowded

[30] I love you.

"I Am Offering This Poem", © 1990, New Directions Publishing Corp.. Reprinted with permission, all rights reserved.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following statements best describes a theme of the poem? [RL.2]
    A. Sometimes people must sacrifice their own well-being for love.
    B. Love is better shown through gifts than expression and devotion.
    C. Love is a gift that can support people, particularly in hard times.
    D. People need their loved ones to provide them physical shelter during harsh times.

2. How does the speaker's use of figurative language contribute to the meaning of the poem? Use evidence from the text in your answer. [RL.4]

3. How does the repetition of the line "I love you" contribute to the overall meaning of the poem? [RL.5]
    A. It reminds the reader that love is the cheapest and easiest gift to give away, decreasing its value.
    B. It shows how offering this poem represents the speaker offering love, creating a sincere tone.
    C. It suggests that love is separate and superior to material gifts, which should not be valued.
    D. It reveals that the speaker's love is a hidden message only discovered by closely reading the poem.

4. PART A: Which of the following best summarizes the speaker's purpose in the piece? [RL.6]
    A. to physically provide for their loved one
    B. to explain how they lost the ability to physically provide for their loved one
    C. to proclaim why they feel strongly about their loved one
    D. to explain what they can provide for their loved one

5. PART B: Which evidence from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]

   A. “I have nothing else to give you” (Line 8)
   B. “I will answer, give you directions, / and let you warm yourself by this fire” (Lines 20-21)
   C. “I love you, / It’s all I have to give, / and all anyone needs to live” (Lines 23-25)
   D. “the world outside / no longer cares if you live or die” (Lines 27-28)

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the context of this poem, can money buy happiness? How does having nothing impact one's ability to love and be happy, if at all?

2. Consider the poet's background. In the context of this poem, how are people changed by love? What actions or behaviors can love provoke in us? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

President Obama's National Address to America's Schoolchildren

By President Barack Obama
2009

President Barack Obama addressed students across America from Wakefield High School to discuss the importance of education. While President Obama discussed the roles of parents, teachers, and the government, he explains the role of students in the education system. As you read, take notes on why President Obama believes education is important in America.

[1] Hello, everybody! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. All right, everybody go ahead and have a seat. How is everybody doing today? How about Tim Spicer?[1] I am here with students at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. And we've got students tuning in from all across America, from kindergarten through 12th grade. And I am just so glad that all could join us today. And I want to thank Wakefield for being such an outstanding host. Give yourselves a big round of applause.



"P101909PS-0253" by Pete Souza is in the public domain.

I know that for many of you, today is the first day of school. And for those of you in kindergarten, or starting middle or high school, it's your first day in a new school, so it's understandable if you're a little nervous. I imagine there are some seniors out there who are feeling pretty good right now with just one more year to go. And no matter what grade you're in, some of you are probably wishing it were still summer and you could've stayed in bed just a little bit longer this morning.

I know that feeling. When I was young, my family lived overseas. I lived in Indonesia for a few years. And my mother, she didn't have the money to send me where all the American kids went to school, but she thought it was important for me to keep up with an American education. So she decided to teach me extra lessons herself, Monday through Friday. But because she had to go to work, the only time she could do it was at 4:30 in the morning.

Now, as you might imagine, I wasn't too happy about getting up that early. And a lot of times, I'd fall asleep right there at the kitchen table. But whenever I'd complain, my mother would just give me one of those looks and she'd say, "This is no picnic for me either, buster."

[5] So I know that some of you are still adjusting to being back at school. But I'm here today because I have something important to discuss with you. I'm here because I want to talk with you about your education and what's expected of all of you in this new school year.

Now, I've given a lot of speeches about education. And I've talked about responsibility a lot.

1. The Wakefield High School student who introduced President Obama

I've talked about teachers' responsibility for inspiring students and pushing you to learn.

I've talked about your parents' responsibility for making sure you stay on track, and you get your homework done, and don't spend every waking hour in front of the TV or with the Xbox.

I've talked a lot about your government's responsibility for setting high standards, and supporting teachers and principals, and turning around schools that aren't working, where students aren't getting the opportunities that they deserve.

[10] But at the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, the best schools in the world — and none of it will make a difference, none of it will matter unless all of you fulfill your responsibilities, unless you show up to those schools, unless you pay attention to those teachers, unless you listen to your parents and grandparents and other adults and put in the hard work it takes to succeed. That's what I want to focus on today: the responsibility each of you has for your education.

I want to start with the responsibility you have to yourself. Every single one of you has something that you're good at. Every single one of you has something to offer. And you have a responsibility to yourself to discover what that is. That's the opportunity an education can provide.

Maybe you could be a great writer — maybe even good enough to write a book or articles in a newspaper — but you might not know it until you write that English paper — that English class paper that's assigned to you. Maybe you could be an innovator[2] or an inventor — maybe even good enough to come up with the next iPhone or the new medicine or vaccine — but you might not know it until you do your project for your science class. Maybe you could be a mayor or a senator or a Supreme Court justice — but you might not know that until you join student government or the debate team.

And no matter what you want to do with your life, I guarantee that you'll need an education to do it. You want to be a doctor, or a teacher, or a police officer? You want to be a nurse or an architect, a lawyer or a member of our military? You're going to need a good education for every single one of those careers. You cannot drop out of school and just drop into a good job. You've got to train for it and work for it and learn for it.

And this isn't just important for your own life and your own future. What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country. The future of America depends on you. What you're learning in school today will determine whether we as a nation can meet our greatest challenges in the future.

[15] You'll need the knowledge and problem-solving skills you learn in science and math to cure diseases like cancer and AIDS, and to develop new energy technologies and protect our environment. You'll need the insights and critical-thinking skills you gain in history and social studies to fight poverty and homelessness, crime and discrimination, and make our nation more fair and more free. You'll need the creativity and ingenuity[3] you develop in all your classes to build new companies that will create new jobs and boost our economy.

2. **Innovator** ***(noun):*** a person who introduces new methods, ideas, or products
3. **Ingenuity** ***(noun):*** the quality of being clever, original, and inventive

We need every single one of you to develop your talents and your skills and your intellect so you can help us old folks solve our most difficult problems. If you don't do that — if you quit on school — you're not just quitting on yourself, you're quitting on your country.

Now, I know it's not always easy to do well in school. I know a lot of you have challenges in your lives right now that can make it hard to focus on your schoolwork.

I get it. I know what it's like. My father left my family when I was two years old, and I was raised by a single mom who had to work and who struggled at times to pay the bills and wasn't always able to give us the things that other kids had. There were times when I missed having a father in my life. There were times when I was lonely and I felt like I didn't fit in.

So I wasn't always as focused as I should have been on school, and I did some things I'm not proud of, and I got in more trouble than I should have. And my life could have easily taken a turn for the worse.

[20] But I was — I was lucky. I got a lot of second chances, and I had the opportunity to go to college and law school and follow my dreams. My wife, our First Lady Michelle Obama, she has a similar story. Neither of her parents had gone to college, and they didn't have a lot of money. But they worked hard, and she worked hard, so that she could go to the best schools in this country.

Some of you might not have those advantages. Maybe you don't have adults in your life who give you the support that you need. Maybe someone in your family has lost their job and there's not enough money to go around. Maybe you live in a neighborhood where you don't feel safe, or have friends who are pressuring you to do things you know aren't right.

But at the end of the day, the circumstances of your life — what you look like, where you come from, how much money you have, what you've got going on at home — none of that is an excuse for neglecting your homework or having a bad attitude in school. That's no excuse for talking back to your teacher, or cutting class, or dropping out of school. There is no excuse for not trying.

Where you are right now doesn't have to determine where you'll end up. No one's written your destiny for you, because here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future.

That's what young people like you are doing every day, all across America.

[25] Young people like Jazmin Perez, from Roma, Texas. Jazmin didn't speak English when she first started school. Neither of her parents had gone to college. But she worked hard, earned good grades, and got a scholarship to Brown University — is now in graduate school, studying public health, on her way to becoming Dr. Jazmin Perez.

I'm thinking about Andoni Schultz, from Los Altos, California, who's fought brain cancer since he was three. He's had to endure all sorts of treatments and surgeries, one of which affected his memory, so it took him much longer — hundreds of extra hours — to do his schoolwork. But he never fell behind. He's headed to college this fall.

And then there's Shantell Steve, from my hometown of Chicago, Illinois. Even when bouncing from foster home to foster home in the toughest neighborhoods in the city, she managed to get a job at a local health care center, start a program to keep young people out of gangs, and she's on track to graduate high school with honors and go on to college.

And Jazmin, Andoni, and Shantell aren't any different from any of you. They face challenges in their lives just like you do. In some cases they've got it a lot worse off than many of you. But they refused to give up. They chose to take responsibility for their lives, for their education, and set goals for themselves. And I expect all of you to do the same.

That's why today I'm calling on each of you to set your own goals for your education — and do everything you can to meet them. Your goal can be something as simple as doing all your homework, paying attention in class, or spending some time each day reading a book. Maybe you'll decide to get involved in an extracurricular activity or volunteer in your community. Maybe you'll decide to stand up for kids who are being teased or bullied because of who they are or how they look, because you believe, like I do, that all young people deserve a safe environment to study and learn. Maybe you'll decide to take better care of yourself so you can be more ready to learn. And along those lines, by the way, I hope all of you are washing your hands a lot, and that you stay home from school when you don't feel well, so we can keep people from getting the flu this fall and winter.

[30] But whatever you resolve to do, I want you to commit to it. I want you to really work at it.

I know that sometimes you get that sense from TV that you can be rich and successful without any hard work — that your ticket to success is through rapping or basketball or being a reality TV star. Chances are you're not going to be any of those things.

The truth is, being successful is hard. You won't love every subject that you study. You won't click with every teacher that you have. Not every homework assignment will seem completely relevant to your life right at this minute. And you won't necessarily succeed at everything the first time you try.

That's okay. Some of the most successful people in the world are the ones who've had the most failures. J.K. Rowling's — who wrote *Harry Potter* — her first Harry Potter book was rejected 12 times before it was finally published. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. He lost hundreds of games and missed thousands of shots during his career. But he once said, "I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that's why I succeed."

These people succeeded because they understood that you can't let your failures define you — you have to let your failures teach you. You have to let them show you what to do differently the next time. So if you get into trouble, that doesn't mean you're a troublemaker, it means you need to try harder to act right. If you get a bad grade, that doesn't mean you're stupid, it just means you need to spend more time studying.

[35] No one's born being good at all things. You become good at things through hard work. You're not a varsity athlete the first time you play a new sport. You don't hit every note the first time you sing a song. You've got to practice. The same principle applies to your schoolwork. You might have to do a math problem a few times before you get it right. You might have to read something a few times before you understand it. You definitely have to do a few drafts of a paper before it's good enough to hand in.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. I do that every day. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength because it shows you have the courage to admit when you don't know something, and that then allows you to learn something new. So find an adult that you trust — a parent, a grandparent or teacher, a coach or a counselor — and ask them to help you stay on track to meet your goals.

And even when you're struggling, even when you're discouraged, and you feel like other people have given up on you, don't ever give up on yourself, because when you give up on yourself, you give up on your country.

The story of America isn't about people who quit when things got tough. It's about people who kept going, who tried harder, who loved their country too much to do anything less than their best.

It's the story of students who sat where you sit 250 years ago and went on to wage a revolution, and they founded this nation. Young people. Students who sat where you sit 75 years ago who overcame a Depression and won a world war; who fought for civil rights and put a man on the moon. Students who sat where you sit 20 years ago who founded Google and Twitter and Facebook and changed the way we communicate with each other.

[40] So today, I want to ask all of you, what's your contribution going to be? What problems are you going to solve? What discoveries will you make? What will a President who comes here in 20 or 50 or 100 years say about what all of you did for this country?

Now, your families, your teachers, and I are doing everything we can to make sure you have the education you need to answer these questions. I'm working hard to fix up your classrooms and get you the books and the equipment and the computers you need to learn. But you've got to do your part, too. So I expect all of you to get serious this year. I expect you to put your best effort into everything you do. I expect great things from each of you. So don't let us down. Don't let your family down or your country down. Most of all, don't let yourself down. Make us all proud.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you.

"President Obama's National Address to America's Schoolchildren" by Barack Obama (2009) is in the public domain.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text?
    A. Teachers should understand that some students come from difficult backgrounds, and teachers should support them more.
    B. President Obama wants students to focus on education like he did so they will have the knowledge they need to run the country one day.
    C. By getting a good education, students can avoid repeating the same mistakes their parents made that prevented them from meeting their potential.
    D. Focusing on education, despite any challenges one may face, is a personal responsibility and the key to the nation's future success.

2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "I'm here because I want to talk with you about your education and what's expected of all of you in this new school year." (Paragraph 5)
    B. "And this isn't just important for your own life and your own future. What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country." (Paragraph 14)
    C. "Neither of her parents had gone to college, and they didn't have a lot of money. But they worked hard, and she worked hard, so that she could go to the best schools" (Paragraph 20)
    D. "Maybe you don't have adults in your life who give you the support that you need." (Paragraph 21)

3. PART A: How does paragraph 29 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
    A. It criticizes students for not being more involved in school.
    B. It suggests actions students can take in school to pursue their future careers.
    C. It reminds students that their future is at stake if they quit trying in school.
    D. It encourages students to set goals and take responsibility for their education.

4. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "They chose to take responsibility for their lives, for their education, and set goals for themselves. And I expect all of you to do the same." (Paragraph 28)
    B. "I hope all of you are washing your hands a lot, and that you stay home from school when you don't feel well" (Paragraph 29)
    C. "I know that sometimes you get that sense from TV that you can be rich and successful without any hard work" (Paragraph 31)
    D. "And you won't necessarily succeed at everything the first time you try." (Paragraph 32)

5. PART A: Which statement best describes the relationship between education and a student's future?

    A. Students have to get an education so they can fail, because without failure you can't succeed.
    B. Students who think about the future of America are the best students.
    C. Students can prepare for their future careers by first exploring their talents in school.
    D. Students who pursue careers in sports or entertainment will never succeed.

6. PART B: Which paragraph from the text best supports the answer to PART A?

    A. Paragraph 12
    B. Paragraph 16
    C. Paragraph 31
    D. Paragraph 34

7. How does President Barack Obama express his point of view on students pursuing education? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Have you ever come across obstacles that made it difficult to perform your best in school? How did you overcome these obstacles?

2. Do you agree with President Obama – do you think "the future of America depends on you" (Paragraph 14)? Why or why not?

3. In the context of the text, what is the goal of education? What different reasons does President Obama give for pursuing an education in the United States? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

4. In the context of the text, why do people succeed? How does President Obama think education contributes to success? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Drive-In Movies

By Gary Soto
1990

Gary Soto is an American poet, novelist, and memoirist. In this short story, Soto describes his desire to go to the drive-in movies as a kid. As you read, take notes on what the narrator does to get what he wants.

[1] For our family, moviegoing was rare. But if our mom, tired from a week of candling eggs,[1] woke up happy on a Saturday morning, there was a chance we might later scramble to our blue Chevy and beat nightfall to the Starlight Drive-In. My brother and sister knew this. I knew this. So on Saturday we tried to be good. We sat in the cool shadows of the TV with the volume low and watched cartoons, a prelude[2] of what was to come.



"Drive In" by Stefani is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

One Saturday I decided to be extra good. When she came out of the bedroom tying her robe, she yawned a hat-sized yawn and blinked red eyes at the weak brew of coffee I had fixed for her. I made her toast with strawberry jam spread to all the corners and set three boxes of cereal in front of her. If she didn't care to eat cereal, she could always look at the back of the boxes as she drank her coffee.

I went outside. The lawn was tall but too wet with dew to mow. I picked up a trowel[3] and began to weed the flower bed. The weeds were really bermuda grass,[4] long stringers that ran finger-deep in the ground. I got to work quickly and in no time crescents of earth began rising under my fingernails. I was sweaty hot. My knees hurt from kneeling, and my brain was dull from making the trowel go up and down, dribbling crumbs of earth. I dug for a half an hour, then stopped to play with the neighbor's dog and pop ticks from his poor snout.

I then mowed the lawn, which was still beaded with dew and noisy with bees hovering over clover. This job was less dull because as I pushed the mower over the shaggy lawn, I could see it looked tidier. My brother and sister watched from the window. Their faces were fat with cereal, a third helping. I made a face at them when they asked how come I was working. Rick pointed to part of the lawn.

[5] "You missed some over there." I ignored him and kept my attention on the windmill of grassy blades.

While I was emptying the catcher, a bee stung the bottom of my foot. I danced on one leg and was ready to cry when Mother showed her face at the window. I sat down on the grass and examined my foot: the stinger was pulsating.[5] I pulled it out quickly, ran water over the sting and packed it with mud, Grandmother's remedy.

1. to test an egg for freshness or fertility by holding it to a light
2. an action or event serving as an introduction to something larger
3. a small handheld tool with a curved scoop for lifting plants out of the ground
4. a type of grass common in warmer parts of the world

Hobbling, I returned to the flower bed where I pulled more stringers and again played with the dog. More ticks had migrated[6] to his snout. I swept the front steps, took out the garbage, cleaned the lint filter to the dryer (easy), plucked hair from the industrial wash basin[7] in the garage (also easy), hosed off the patio, smashed three snails sucking paint from the house (disgusting but fun), tied a bundle of newspapers, put away toys, and, finally, seeing that almost everything was done and the sun was not too high, started waxing the car.

My brother joined me with an old gym sock, and our sister watched us while sucking on a cherry Kool-Aid cube. The liquid wax drooled onto the sock, and we began to swirl the white slop on the chrome. My arms ached from buffing, which though less boring than weeding, was harder. But the beauty was evident. The shine, hurting our eyes and glinting like an armful of dimes, brought Mother out. She looked around the yard and said, "Pretty good." She winced at the grille and returned inside the house.

We began to wax the paint. My brother applied the liquid and I followed him rubbing hard in wide circles as we moved around the car. I began to hurry because my arms were hurting and my stung foot looked like a water balloon. We were working around the trunk when Rick pounded on the bottle of wax. He squeezed the bottle and it sneezed a few more white drops.

[10] We looked at each other. "There's some on the sock," I said. "Let's keep going."

We polished and buffed, sweat weeping on our brows. We got scared when we noticed that the gym sock was now blue. The paint was coming off. Our sister fit ice cubes into our mouths and we worked harder, more intently, more dedicated to the car and our mother. We ran the sock over the chrome, trying to pick up extra wax. But there wasn't enough to cover the entire car. Only half got waxed, but we thought it was better than nothing and went inside for lunch. After lunch, we returned outside with tasty sandwiches.

Rick and I nearly jumped. The waxed side of the car was foggy white. We took a rag and began to polish vigorously[8] and nearly in tears, but the fog wouldn't come off. I blamed Rick and he blamed me. Debra stood at the window, not wanting to get involved. Now, not only would we not go to the movies, but Mom would surely snap a branch from the plum tree and chase us around the yard.

Mom came out and looked at us with hands on her aproned hips. Finally, she said, "you boys worked so hard." She turned on the garden hose and washed the car. That night we did go to the drive-in. The first feature was about nothing, and the second feature, starring Jerry Lewis, was *Cinderfella*.[9] I tried to stay awake. I kept a wad of homemade popcorn in my cheek and laughed when Jerry Lewis fit golf tees in his nose. I rubbed my watery eyes. I laughed and looked at my mom. I promised myself I would remember that scene with the golf tees and promised myself not to work so hard the coming Saturday.

Twenty minutes into the movie, I fell asleep with one hand in the popcorn.

"The Drive-In Movies" by Gary Soto © 1990. Used by permission of the author.

5. to vibrate; to expand and contract repeatedly
6. **Migrate** ***(verb):*** to move from one region to another
7. a very large wash basin or tub, suitable for use in a factory
8. **Vigorous** ***(adjective):*** done with force and energy
9. a comedy film adaption of the classic Cinderella story, released in 1960

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: How do the narrator's actions develop the story's theme?
    A. He does chores because he wants to go to the movies, which shows the value of working toward one's goals.
    B. He misses out on his reward by falling asleep, which makes him believe that hard work is not worth it.
    C. He works hard and realizes that it is better to earn rewards rather than just to receive them.
    D. He goes against his mother's rules, which suggests that breaking rules can make people happy.

2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "She looked around the yard and said, 'Pretty good.' She winced at the grille and returned inside the house." (Paragraph 8)
    B. "We polished and buffed, sweat weeping on our brows. We got scared when we noticed that the gym sock was now blue. The paint was coming off." (Paragraph 11)
    C. "Finally, she said, 'you boys worked so hard.' She turned on the garden hose and washed the car. That night we did go to the drive-in." (Paragraph 13)
    D. "Twenty minutes into the movie, I fell asleep with one hand in the popcorn." (Paragraph 14)

3. PART A: How is the narrator affected when parts of the car turn white?
    A. He is embarrassed that the family will now be seen in an ugly car.
    B. He feels proud of how hard he and his brother worked on the car.
    C. He feels guilty for getting his siblings involved in his own plans.
    D. He is worried that all of his hard work will actually anger his mother.

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "But the beauty was evident. The shine, hurting our eyes and glinting like an armful of dimes, brought Mother out." (Paragraph 8)
    B. "I blamed Rick and he blamed me. Debra stood at the window, not wanting to get involved." (Paragraph 12)
    C. "Now, not only would we not go to the movies, but Mom would surely snap a branch from the plum tree and chase us around the yard." (Paragraph 12)
    D. "I promised myself I would remember that scene with the golf tees and promised myself not to work so hard the coming Saturday." (Paragraph 13)

5. How does paragraph 7 help develop the plot of the story?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you have chores? Why or why not? Does the reward ever turn out differently than you expect?

2. In the context of the story, what does it mean to be grown up? In your opinion, is the narrator "grown up"? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

3. In the context of the story, what makes a family? How would you describe the narrator, his siblings, and his mother's interactions? What about them reminds you of a family? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Emperor's New Clothes

By Hans Christian Andersen
1837

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was a Danish author who is best known for his fairy tales—many of which have been converted into Disney movies. "The Emperor's New Clothes," the story of a vain emperor, was published alongside "The Little Mermaid" in 1837 and has been translated into over 100 languages. As you read, take notes on any evidence that answers the questions: What leads to the emperor's demise, and what are the effects of following the crowd?

[1] Many years ago there was an Emperor so exceedingly fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on being well dressed. He cared nothing about reviewing his soldiers, going to the theatre, or going for a ride in his carriage, except to show off his new clothes. He had a coat for every hour of the day, and instead of saying, as one might, about any other ruler, "The King's in council," here they always said, "The Emperor's in his dressing room."



"Mannequin 1" is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

In the great city where he lived, life was always gay[1]. Every day many strangers came to town, and among them one day came two swindlers. They let it be known they were weavers, and they said they could weave the most magnificent fabrics imaginable. Not only were their colors and patterns uncommonly fine, but clothes made of this cloth had a wonderful way of becoming invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office, or who was unusually stupid.

"Those would be just the clothes for me," thought the Emperor. "If I wore them I would be able to discover which men in my empire are unfit for their posts. And I could tell the wise men from the fools. Yes, I certainly must get some of the stuff woven for me right away." He paid the two swindlers a large sum of money to start work at once.

They set up two looms and pretended to weave, though there was nothing on the looms. All the finest silk and the purest old thread which they demanded went into their traveling bags, while they worked the empty looms far into the night.

[5] "I'd like to know how those weavers are getting on with the cloth," the Emperor thought, but he felt slightly uncomfortable when he remembered that those who were unfit for their position would not be able to see the fabric. It couldn't have been that he doubted himself, yet he thought he'd rather send someone else to see how things were going. The whole town knew about the cloth's peculiar power, and all were impatient to find out how stupid their neighbors were.

1. an old-fashioned way of saying lighthearted or carefree

"I'll send my honest old minister to the weavers," the Emperor decided. "He'll be the best one to tell me how the material looks, for he's a sensible man and no one does his duty better."

So the honest old minister went to the room where the two swindlers sat working away at their empty looms.

"Heaven help me," he thought as his eyes flew wide open, "I can't see anything at all." But he did not say so.

Both the swindlers begged him to be so kind as to come near to approve the excellent pattern, the beautiful colors. They pointed to the empty looms, and the poor old minister stared as hard as he dared. He couldn't see anything, because there was nothing to see. "Heaven have mercy," he thought. "Can it be that I'm a fool? I'd have never guessed it, and not a soul must know. Am I unfit to be the minister? It would never do to let on that I can't see the cloth."

[10] "Don't hesitate to tell us what you think of it," said one of the weavers.

"Oh, it's beautiful—it's enchanting." The old minister peered through his spectacles. "Such a pattern, what colors!" I'll be sure to tell the Emperor how delighted I am with it."

"We're pleased to hear that," the swindlers said. They proceeded to name all the colors and to explain the intricate pattern. The old minister paid the closest attention, so that he could tell it all to the Emperor. And so he did.

The swindlers at once asked for more money, more silk and gold thread, to get on with the weaving. But it all went into their pockets. Not a thread went into the looms, though they worked at their weaving as hard as ever.

The Emperor presently sent another trustworthy official to see how the work progressed and how soon it would be ready. The same thing happened to him that had happened to the minister. He looked and he looked, but as there was nothing to see in the looms he couldn't see anything.

[15] "Isn't it a beautiful piece of goods?" the swindlers asked him, as they displayed and described their imaginary pattern.

"I know I'm not stupid," the man thought, "so it must be that I'm unworthy of my good office. That's strange. I mustn't let anyone find it out, though." So he praised the material he did not see. He declared he was delighted with the beautiful colors and the exquisite pattern. To the Emperor he said, "It held me spellbound."

All the town was talking of this splendid cloth, and the Emperor wanted to see it for himself while it was still in the looms. Attended by a band of chosen men, among whom were his two old trusted officials—the ones who had been to the weavers—he set out to see the two swindlers. He found them weaving with might and main, but without a thread in their looms.

"Magnificent," said the two officials already duped. "Just look, Your Majesty, what colors! What a design!" They pointed to the empty looms, each supposing that the others could see the stuff.

"What's this?" thought the Emperor. "I can't see anything. This is terrible!

Am I a fool? Am I unfit to be the Emperor? What a thing to happen to me of all people!—Oh! It's very pretty," he said. "It has my highest approval." And he nodded approbation at the empty loom. Nothing could make him say that he couldn't see anything.

His whole retinue stared and stared. One saw no more than another, but they all joined the Emperor in exclaiming, "Oh! It's very pretty," and they advised him to wear clothes made of this wonderful cloth especially for the great procession he was soon to lead. "Magnificent! Excellent! Unsurpassed!" were bandied from mouth to mouth, and everyone did his best to seem well pleased. The Emperor gave each of the swindlers a cross to wear in his buttonhole, and the title of "Sir Weaver."

Before the procession the swindlers sat up all night and burned more than six candles, to show how busy they were finishing the Emperor's new clothes. They pretended to take the cloth off the loom. They made cuts in the air with huge scissors. And at last they said, "Now the Emperor's new clothes are ready for him."

Then the Emperor himself came with his noblest noblemen, and the swindlers each raised an arm as if they were holding something. They said, "These are the trousers, here's the coat, and this is the mantle," naming each garment. "All of them are as light as a spider web. One would almost think he had nothing on, but that's what makes them so fine."

"Exactly," all the noblemen agreed, though they could see nothing, for there was nothing to see.

"If Your Imperial Majesty will condescend to take your clothes off," said the swindlers, "we will help you on with your new ones here in front of the long mirror."

The Emperor undressed, and the swindlers pretended to put his new clothes on him, one garment after another. They took him around the waist and seemed to be fastening something—that was his train—as the Emperor turned round and round before the looking glass.

"How well Your Majesty's new clothes look. Aren't they becoming!" He heard on all sides, "That pattern, so perfect! Those colors, so suitable! It is a magnificent outfit."

Then the minister of public processions announced: "Your Majesty's canopy is waiting outside."

"Well, I'm supposed to be ready," the Emperor said, and turned again for one last look in the mirror. "It is a remarkable fit, isn't it?" He seemed to regard his costume with the greatest interest.

The noblemen who were to carry his train stooped low and reached for the floor as if they were picking up his mantle. Then they pretended to lift and hold it high. They didn't dare admit they had nothing to hold.

So off went the Emperor in procession under his splendid canopy. Everyone in the streets and the windows said, "Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!" Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success.

"But he hasn't got anything on," a little child said.

"Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?" said its father. And one person whispered to another what the child had said, "He hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on."

"But he hasn't got anything on!" the whole town cried out at last.

[35] The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.

The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen is in the public domain.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the meaning of the word “swindlers” as it is used in paragraph 2? [RL.4]
    A. Traveling people who weave clothes
    B. Magicians who weave magical clothes
    C. Scammers who con people for money
    D. Spies who lie for information

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
    A. “...they could weave the most magnificent fabrics imaginable.” (Paragraph 2)
    B. “They set up two looms and pretended to weave, though there was nothing on the looms.” (Paragraph 4)
    C. “The whole town knew about the cloth's peculiar power...” (Paragraph 5)
    D. “They proceeded to name all the colors and to explain the intricate pattern.” (Paragraph 12)

3. PART A: Which TWO of the following statements best describe the emperor? [RL.3]
    A. He is obsessed with new clothes.
    B. He is protective of his empire.
    C. He is skeptical of outsiders.
    D. He does not trust the men in his empire.
    E. He is a cruel leader.
    F. He is easily manipulated.

4. PART B: Which TWO of the following quotations best characterize the emperor? [RL.1]
    A. "...instead of saying, as one might, about any other ruler, 'The King's in council,' here they always said, 'The Emperor's in his dressing room.'" (Paragraph 1)
    B. "Every day many strangers came to town, and among them one day came two swindlers." (Paragraph 2)
    C. "He paid the two swindlers a large sum of money to start work at once." (Paragraph 3)
    D. "The Emperor presently sent another trustworthy official to see how the work progressed and how soon it would be ready." (Paragraph 14)
    E. "I know I'm not stupid," (Paragraph 16)
    F. "Am I a fool? Am I unfit to be the Emperor?" (Paragraph 20)

5. Why does the emperor hire the swindlers, and how does this contribute to a major theme in the text? [RL.2]

6. Why do the emperor's advisors tell him the swindlers' clothes are beautiful? [RL.3]

   A. Because they can see the cloth that the emperor cannot
   B. Because they believe they can see the cloth
   C. Because they are also in on the swindlers' plan
   D. Because they are afraid of being stupid or unfit for their positions

7. In paragraph 32, the child says, "But he hasn't got anything on!" How does this line contribute to the theme of the text? [RL.5]

   A. It illustrates the complexity of the swindlers' con
   B. It illustrates the cruelty of the child
   C. It illustrates the Emperor's stupidity
   D. It illustrates the town's humility

8. In the end of the story, it is a small child who reveals that the Emperor is not wearing clothes. What makes the small child different from the adults in the story? [RL.3]

   A. The child is the only character who is not stupid or unfit for their position
   B. The child is the only character who is not swayed by the power and opinions of others
   C. The child is one of the swindlers
   D. The child is the only character who is not swayed by beautiful clothes

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Why is the child the only one who speaks the truth?

2. Can you think of a modern example of a “the emperor has no clothes” moment?

3. In the context of this story, how does power corrupt? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art or literature to answer this question.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

Theseus and the Minotaur

By E2BN.org
2006

In ancient Greece, people told myths to explain the ways of the world. Myths often portrayed brave heroes and vicious monsters. The ancient Greeks also believed in powerful gods who watched over Earth and intervened when they saw fit. In this particular myth, a prince from Greece's capital city of Athens travels by sea to another city, Crete, in order to fight a monster. As you read, take notes on how Theseus' actions and characteristics help drive the plot.

[1] King Minos of Crete was a powerful man, feared by the rulers of the lands around him. When he demanded goods or men for his great armies, they felt they had to agree. When he demanded they send tributes[1] to honour him, they sent them without question. It was the only way they could stop him going to war with them. But his demands on Athens became too much for them to bear.



"Antoine-Louis Barye's 'Theseus Slaying The Minotaur'" by Timothy Vogel is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

King Minos had a great palace built for himself. Inside this palace, Minos had built a giant maze, a labyrinth, and, at the centre of the maze, he kept a terrifying creature – the Minotaur. Now this was no ordinary animal; it was a monster, half man and half bull.

It was powerful and savage,[2] and it loved to eat the flesh of the humans who had been shut into the labyrinth by King Minos. They would wander through the maze, completely lost, until at last they came face to face with the Minotaur. Not a great way to die, really.

As for Athens, Minos demanded that every year King Aegeus of Athens send him seven young men and seven young women.

[5] "Why do we send these young people to Crete every year?" Theseus, the King's son, asked his father. "And why is it that none of them ever return?"

"Because if we did not send them, Minos would wage war on us and it is a war that we would not win," said King Aegeus. "And they do not return because they do not go to Crete as slaves. They go as food for the Minotaur."

"Father, this is terrible," shouted Theseus, "we cannot let this go on. We cannot sacrifice any more of our young citizens to this tyrant. When it is time to send the next tribute, I will go as one of them and I vow that it is the last time the Minotaur will be fed with the flesh of any of our people."

1. In this context, a tribute is a payment made by one state or ruler to another, especially as the price of peace, security, protection or to recognize authority
2. **Savage** ***(adjective):*** fierce, violent, or uncontrolled

Try as he might, his father could not persuade him to change his mind. Aegeus reminded him that every year, other young men had sworn to slay this terrible beast and they had never been seen again.

Theseus insisted that he understood the dangers but would succeed. "I will return to you, father," cried Theseus, as the ship left the harbour[3] wall, "and you will be proud of your son."

[10] "Then I wish you good luck, my son," cried his father, "I shall keep watch for you every day. If you are successful, take down these black sails and replace them with white ones. That way I will know you are coming home safe to me."

As the ship docked in Crete, King Minos himself came down to inspect the prisoners from Athens. He enjoyed the chance to taunt the Athenians and to humiliate[4] them even further.

"Is this all your king has to offer this year?" he jeered. "Such puny[5] creatures. Hardly even a snack for the mighty creature within the labyrinth. Anyway, let's get on with it. I am not a hard-hearted man, so I will let you choose which one goes first into the Minotaur's den. Who is it to be?"

Theseus stepped forward.

"I will go first. I am Theseus, Prince of Athens and I do not fear what is within the walls of your maze."

[15] "Those are brave words for one so young and so feeble.[6] But the Minotaur will soon have you between its horns. Guards, open the labyrinth and send him in."

Standing behind the king, listening, was his daughter, Ariadne. From the moment she set eyes on Theseus, Ariadne fell in love with him. As she listened to her father goading[7] and taunting the young prince, she decided that she would help him. As he entered the labyrinth and the guards walked away, she called softly to him.

"Theseus, take this," she whispered. "Even if you kill the Minotaur, you will never find your way out again."

She threw him a great ball of string and he tied one end of it to the entrance. He smiled at her, turned and began to make his way into the maze, the string playing out behind him as he went.

Theseus walked carefully through the dark, foul-smelling passages of the labyrinth, expecting at any moment to come face-to-face with the creature. He did not have long to wait. Turning a corner, with his hands held out in front of him feeling his way, he suddenly touched what felt like a huge bony horn.

[20] In an instant his world turned upside-down, quite literally. He was picked up between the Minotaur's horns and tossed high into the air. When he landed on the hard cold stone, he felt the animal's huge hooves come down on his chest. Every last breath seemed to be knocked out of him and he struggled to stay alive in the darkness.

3. A harbour is a place on the coast where ships may find shelter
4. **Humiliate** ***(verb):*** to make someone feel ashamed or foolish
5. **Puny** ***(adjective):*** small and weak
6. **Feeble** ***(adjective):*** lacking physical strength, especially due to age or illness
7. **Goad** ***(verb):*** to provoke or annoy in order to create a reaction

But Theseus was no ordinary man. He was the son of the King, he was brave and he was stubborn. As the Minotaur bellowed[8] in his ear and grabbed at him with its hairy arms, Theseus found a strength which he did not know he possessed.

He grabbed the animal's huge horns, and kept on twisting the great head from side to side. As the animal grew weak, Theseus gave one almighty tug on the head, turning it almost right around. The creature's neck snapped, it gurgled its last breath and fell to the floor with an enormous thud.

It was over, he had done it. The Minotaur was dead. All he had to do was make his way out of... and then he realised the awful truth. In the struggle, he had let go of the string, his lifeline. Theseus felt all over the floor in the pitch darkness and kept thinking he had found it, only to realise that all he had was a long wiry hair from the Minotaur.

Despair[9] set in and Theseus wondered if this was where his life would end, down in the dark, all alone, next to the stinking body. Then, his hand brushed a piece of string and, with a whoop of delight, he knew he had found the thread which would lead him back out. As he neared the entrance of the labyrinth, the darkness began to fade and he made out the figure of Ariadne, waiting for his return.

[25] "You must take me back to Athens with you," she cried, "My father will kill me when he finds out that I have helped you."

"But of course you must come with us," said Theseus, "it would be cruel to leave you here." Quickly and quietly, they unfurled[10] the great black sails of their ship and headed for home.

"I cannot believe how my life has changed," said Ariadne, as they sailed across the calm seas towards Athens. "To think that I am free of my cruel father and that I will soon be married to a great prince."

"Married?" said Theseus, "Oh, yes, that will be... er... wonderful." But in truth, Theseus did not really find her attractive.

So, when their ship docked at an island on their way home, to collect fresh water, Theseus sent Ariadne off to find bread and fruit. The moment she was gone, he set sail and left her on the island. Now, you might think that this was a bad way to reward someone who had helped him and had saved him from certain death.

[30] The Gods clearly thought the same thing, for they had a further horror in store for him, as a punishment for his ungrateful treatment of the young girl.

In his haste[11] to get away, Theseus forgot to change his sails to white. King Aegeus, waiting on the headland, saw the ship approaching with its black sails flying in the wind.

"My son has failed and he is dead," he cried. And in despair, he flung himself from the cliff into the raging waters below. From that day on, the sea was named in memory of Theseus' father, and to this day, it is known as the Aegean Sea.

8. **Bellow** ***(verb):*** to shout in a loud or deep voice
9. **Despair** ***(noun):*** a feeling that everything is wrong and nothing will get better
10. to open something, like a flag, so that it is spread out
11. **Haste** ***(noun):*** speed or hurry, often made with urgency

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. How does the author characterize Theseus in the story? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

2. PART A: How does the interaction between Theseus and King Minos in paragraphs 12-15 contribute to the plot as a whole?
    A. It establishes King Minos as Theseus' central challenge in the labyrinth, setting up the king's battle with Theseus.
    B. It creates an atmosphere of fear which remains with Theseus as he travels the labyrinth.
    C. It helps the reader to fully visualize the new setting of Crete through the eyes of Theseus.
    D. It further contrasts King Minos' villainous ways with Theseus' bravery, setting Theseus up as the hero.

3. PART B: Which later quote from the story confirms your answer to Part A?
    A. "Theseus walked carefully through the dark, foul-smelling passages of the labyrinth, expecting at any moment to come face-to-face with the creature." (Paragraph 19)
    B. "He was picked up between the Minotaur's horns and tossed high into the air. When he landed on the hard cold stone, he felt the animal's huge hooves come down on his chest." (Paragraph 20)
    C. "As the Minotaur bellowed in his ear and grabbed at him with its hairy arms, Theseus found a strength which he did not know he possessed." (Paragraph 21)
    D. "Theseus felt all over the floor in the pitch darkness and kept thinking he had found it, only to realize that all he had was a long wiry hair from the Minotaur." (Paragraph 23)

4. PART A: What does the word "tyrant" most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 7?
    A. A person who runs a country
    B. A leader who torments people
    C. A soldier who is ready to fight
    D. An innocent young citizen

5. PART B: Which quote from later in the story best supports your answer to Part A?
    A. "As the ship docked in Crete, King Minos himself came down to inspect the prisoners from Athens." (Paragraph 11)
    B. "He enjoyed the chance to taunt the Athenians and to humiliate them even further." (Paragraph 11)
    C. "'Those are brave words for one so young and so feeble.'" (Paragraph 15)
    D. "Standing behind the king, listening, was his daughter, Ariadne." (Paragraph 16)

6. How do the actions of Ariadne help further the plot? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. If it weren't for Ariadne, do you think Theseus would have been able to get out of the maze? Use details about the maze and Theseus' character to support your ideas.

2. How does the ending of the story change your opinion of Theseus' character? Do you think the gods should punish him? Why or why not?

3. The Ancient Greeks often told myths to explain how things came to be and to teach a lesson. What do we, as readers, learn from this myth about power? How can power corrupt people? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

4. In the context of this myth, what makes a hero? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

Fish Cheeks

By Amy Tan
1987

Amy Tan (born 1952) is an American writer whose work often provides insight into the experiences of Chinese Americans and mother-daughter relationships. While her parents emigrated from China, Tan herself was born in Oakland, California. As you read, take notes on how the author's use of imagery contributes to the overall tone.

[1] I fell in love with the minister's son the winter I turned fourteen. He was not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger. For Christmas I prayed for this blond-haired boy, Robert, and a slim new American nose.

When I found out that my parents had invited the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried. What would Robert think of our shabby Chinese Christmas? What would he think of our noisy Chinese relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but Chinese food?

On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu. She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns.[1] The kitchen was littered with appalling[2] mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their backs crisscrossed with knife markings so they resembled bicycle tires.



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And then they arrived — the minister's family and all my relatives in a clamor[3] of doorbells and rumpled Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.

1. A prawn is a common name, used particularly in the United Kingdom and Ireland, for large swimming crustaceans or shrimp.
2. **Appalling** ***(adjective):*** causing shock, disgust, or alarm
3. **Clamor** ***(noun):*** loud and confusing noise

[5] Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them. My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert grimaced. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. "Amy, your favorite," he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear.

At the end of the meal my father leaned back and belched loudly, thanking my mother for her fine cooking. "It's a polite Chinese custom to show you are satisfied," explained my father to our astonished guests. Robert was looking down at his plate with a reddened face. The minister managed to muster up a quiet burp. I was stunned into silence for the rest of the night.

After everyone had gone, my mother said to me, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame."

And even though I didn't agree with her then, I knew that she understood how much I had suffered during the evening's dinner. It wasn't until many years later — long after I had gotten over my crush on Robert — that I was able to fully appreciate her lesson and the true purpose behind our particular menu. For Christmas Eve that year, she had chosen all my favorite foods.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. How does the narrator's description of the cod in paragraph 3 impact the tone of the passage? [RL.4]
    A. She describes it as “slimy” and pathetic, which contributes to the angry tone of the passage.
    B. She describes it as “slimy” with “bulging eyes,” which contributes to the horrified tone of the passage.
    C. She describes it as pleading with big “bulging eyes,” which contributes to the pitying tone of the passage.
    D. She describes it as pleading not to be cooked, which contributes to the mocking tone of the passage.

2. How does the narrator’s point of view affect how the events are described in the passage? [RL.6]
    A. She is nervous to have the boy she likes over for Christmas dinner, and so the text focuses entirely on the boy’s reactions.
    B. She is bored with her family’s old Chinese traditions and wants to try new modern customs, and this affects how she focuses on being more “American.”
    C. She is excited to have the minister’s son over for Christmas, and this excitement causes her to criticize every little detail of her mother’s cooking.
    D. She is embarrassed by her family’s Chinese customs, and this shame influences how she describes the food and her family’s behavior.

3. PART A: What does the word “despair” mean as used in paragraph 5? [RL.4]
    A. shock
    B. misery
    C. frustration
    D. disgust

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
    A. “Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.” (Paragraph 4)
    B. “My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table” (Paragraph 5)
    C. “I was stunned into silence for the rest of the night.” (Paragraph 6)
    D. “how much I had suffered during the evening’s dinner” (Paragraph 8)

5. What does paragraph 8 reveal about the narrator’s character development? [RL.3]
    A. After the dinner, she realizes that the minister’s son is not as friendly as she thought.
    B. As an adult, she regrets trying to fit in with other Americans and losing her identity.
    C. Years later, she learns to appreciate her family and her Chinese American identity.
    D. Years later, she learns to love her mother’s cooking, which she previously hated.

6. In paragraph 7, Amy's mother says to her, "'You want to be the same as American girls on the outside… But inside you must always be Chinese.'" How does this quote contribute to the overall meaning of the story? [RL.6]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. How does the speaker's family act during dinner? How does the minister's family act during dinner? Why do they act so differently? Explain.

2. In the context of this text, what makes you who you are? Is it possible to change your identity? Should you try? Explain.

3. Although they are a family, the narrator feels as if she doesn't belong. In the context of this story, what makes a family? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

Names/Nombres

by Julia Alvarez

1985

Julia Alvarez is a Dominican-American poet, novelist, and essayist. Alvarez was born in New York but spent the first ten years of her childhood in the Dominican Republic until her family had to flee the country due to her father's involvement in a political rebellion. Much of Alvarez's work focuses on her experiences as a Dominican in the United States. In this essay, Alvarez discusses the multiple names she has been given over the years.

As you read, take notes on how the author reacts to the different pronunciations of the names discussed in the text.



"Untitled" by Annie Spratt is licensed under CC0.

When we arrived in New York City, our names changed almost immediately. At Immigration, the officer asked my father, *Mister Elbures*, if he had anything to declare. My father shook his head no, and we were waved through. I was too afraid we wouldn't be let in if I corrected the man's pronunciation, but I said our name to myself, opening my mouth wide for the organ blast of *a*, trilling my tongue for the drumroll of the *r*, *All-vah-rrr-es*! How could anyone get *Elbures* out of that orchestra of sound?

At the hotel my mother was *Missus Alburest,* and I was *little girl*, as in, "Hey, little girl, stop riding the elevator up and down. It's *not* a toy."

We moved into our new apartment building, the super called my father *Mister Alberase*, and the neighbors who became mother's friends pronounced her name *Jew-lee-ah* instead of *Hoo-lee-ah*. I, her namesake, was known as *Hoo-lee-tah* at home. But at school I was *Judy* or *Judith*, and once an English teacher mistook me for *Juliet*. Q1

It took me a while to get used to my new names. I wondered if I shouldn't correct my teachers and new friends. But my mother argued that it didn't matter. "You know what your friend Shakespeare said, 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet'." My family had gotten into the habit of calling any famous author "my friend" because I had begun to write poems and stories in English class.

y the time I was in high school, I was a popular kid, and it showed in my name. Friends called me *Jules* or *Hey Jude*, 1 and once a group of troublemaking friends my mother forbade me to hang out with called me *Alcatraz*. 2 I was *Hoo-lee-tah* only to Mami and Papi and uncles and aunts who came over to eat *sancocho* 3 on Sunday afternoons — old world folk whom I would just as soon go back to where they came from and leave me to pursue whatever mischief I wanted to in America. JUDY ALCATRAZ, the name on the "Wanted" poster would read. Who would ever trace her to me?

My older sister had the hardest time getting an American name for herself because *Mauricia* did not translate into English. Ironically, although she had the most foreign-sounding name, she and I were the Americans in the family. We had been born in New York City when our parents had first tried immigration and then gone back "home," too homesick to stay. My mother often told the story of how she had almost changed my sister's name in the hospital.

After the delivery, Mami and some other new mothers were cooing over their new baby sons and daughters and exchanging names and weights and delivery stories. My mother was embarrassed among the Sallys and Janes and Georges and Johns to reveal the rich, noisy name of *Mauricia*, so when her turn came to brag, she gave her baby's name as *Maureen*.

"Why'd ya give her an Irish name with so many pretty Spanish names to choose from?" one of the women asked.

My mother blushed and admitted her baby's real name to the group. Her mother-in-law had recently died, she apologized, and her husband had insisted that the first daughter be named after his mother, *Mauran*. My mother thought it the ugliest name she had ever heard, and she talked my father into what she believed was an improvement, a combination of *Mauran* and her own mother's name, *Felicia*. Q2

"Her name is *Mao-ree-shee-ah*," my mother said to the group of women.

"Why, that's a beautiful name," the new mothers cried. "*Moor-ee-sha, Moor-eesha*," they cooed into the pink blanket. *Moor-ee-sha* it was when we returned to the States eleven years later. Sometimes American tongues found even that mispronunciation tough to say and called her *Maria* or *Marsha* or *Maudy* from her nickname *Maury*. I pitied her. What an awful name to have to transport across borders!

My little sister, Ana, had the easiest time of all. She was plain *Anne* — that is, only her name was plain, for she turned out to be the pale, blond "American beauty" in the family. The only Hispanic thing about her was the affectionate nicknames her boyfriends sometimes gave her. *Anita*, or, as one goofy guy used to sing to her to the tune of the banana advertisement *Anita Banana*.

Later, during her college years in the late sixties, there was a push to pronounce Third World 4 names correctly. I remember calling her long distance at her group house and a roommate answering.

"Can I speak to Ana?" I asked, pronouncing her name the American way.

"Ana?" The man's voice hesitated. "Oh! You must mean *Ah-nah*!" Q3

Our first few years in the States, though, ethnicity [5] was not yet "in." Those were the blond, blue-eyed, bobby-sock years of junior high and high school before the sixties ushered in peasant blouses, hoop earrings, *sarapes*. [6] My initial desire to be known by my correct Dominican name faded. I just wanted to be Judy and merge with the Sallys and the Janes in my class. But, inevitably, my accent and coloring gave me away. "So where are you from, Judy?"

"New York," I told my classmates. After all, I had been born blocks away at Columbia – Presbyterian Hospital.

"I mean, *originally*."

"From the Caribbean," I answered vaguely, for if I specified, no one was quite sure on what continent our island was located.

"Really? I've been to Bermuda. We went last April for spring vacation. I got the worst sunburn! So, are you from Portoriko?"

"No," I sighed. "From the Dominican Republic."

"Where's that?"

"South of Bermuda."

They were just being curious, I knew, but I burned with shame whenever they singled me out as a "foreigner," a rare, exotic friend.

"Say your name in Spanish, oh, please say it!" I had made mouths drop one day by rattling off my full name, which, according to the Dominican custom, included my middle names, Mother's and Father's surnames for four generations back.

"Julia Altagracia María Teresa Álverez Tavares Perello Espaillat Julia Pérez Rochet González." I pronounced it slowly, a name as chaotic with sounds as a Middle Eastern bazaar [7] or market day in a South American village. Q4

My Dominican heritage was never more apparent than when my extended family attended school occasions. For my graduation, they all came, the whole lot of aunts and uncles and the many little cousins who snuck in without tickets. They sat in the first row in order to better understand the Americans' fast-spoken English. But how could they listen when they were constantly speaking among themselves in florid [8]-sounding phrases, rococo [9] consonants, rich, rhyming vowel?

Introducing them to my friends was a further trial to me. These relatives had such complicated names and there were so many of them, and their relationships to myself were so convoluted. [10] There was my Tía Josefina, who was not really an aunt but a much older cousin. And her daughter, Aida Margarita, who was adopted, *una hija de crianza*. [11] My uncle of affection, Tío José, brought my *madrina* [12] Tia Amelia and her *comadre* [13] Tía Pilar. My friends rarely had more than a "Mom and Dad" to introduce.

After the commencement ceremony, my family waited outside in the parking lot while my friends and I signed yearbooks with nicknames which recalled our high school good times: "Beans" and "Pepperoni" and "Alcatraz." We hugged and cried and promised to keep in touch.

Our goodbyes went on too long. I heard my father's voice calling out across the parking lot, "*Hoo-lee-tah! Vámonos*!" [14]

Back home, my tíos and tías and *primas*, [15] Mami and Papi, and *mis hermanas* [16] had a party for me with *sancocho* and a store-bought *pudín*, [17] inscribed with *Happy Graduation, Julie*. There were many gifts — that was a plus to a large family! I got several wallets and a suitcase with my initials and a graduation charm from my godmother and money from my uncles. The biggest gift was a portable typewriter from my parents for writing my stories and poems.

Someday, the family predicted, my name would be well-known throughout the United States. I laughed to myself, wondering which one I would go by. Q5

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Notes

All **Definitions** **Footnotes**

1. a popular song by the English rock band the Beatles
2. referring to a maximum high security federal prison on Alcatraz Island where the most infamous criminals were sent
3. a traditional soup in several Latin American cuisines
4. a phrase commonly used to refer to the developing nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America
5. **Ethnicity** *(noun) :*
a social group that shares a common, distinctive culture, religion, language, or race; belonging to such a group
6. blanket-like shawls
7. a typically open-air market in a Middle Eastern country
8. **Florid** *(adjective) :*
overly flowerly or elaborate
9. extravagant
10. **Convoluted** *(adjective) :* extremely complex and difficult to follow
11. Spanish for "a child raised as one's own"
12. Spanish for "godmother"
13. Spanish for "close female friend"
14. translates to "let's go!"
15. translates to "cousins"
16. translates to "my sisters"
17. translates to "pudding"

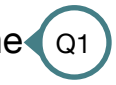
QUESTIONS

Guiding

Assessment

Discussion

This text has **Guided Reading Mode**. Should you choose to enable Guided Reading Mode with your students for this assignment, they will be prompted to answer guiding comprehension questions as they read. The text is revealed as students answer questions correctly and multiple attempts are allowed. Guiding questions are not scored.

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