

# Look back



How did we get here? From mythical creatures to life on the frontier, from romantic adventures to daring modern-day escapes, take an exciting journey through time that will bring you right back to where you began...

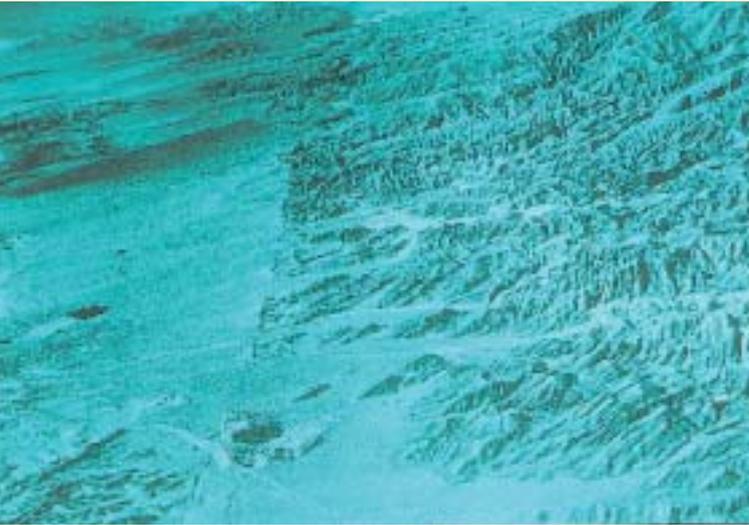
This unit looks back at literature from earlier times: traditional tales, westerns, and romance. It also talks about the adventures of immigrants in our society.



# Pangaea

SALLY ITO

*Wegener is the scientist who developed the theory of continental drift. Pangaea was the name he gave to the original land mass that existed before it split apart to form the various continents.*



Wegener had it right.  
We are all from the same continent,  
from the same void  
of disturbed memories.

Our feet, swift and light,  
traversed the plain  
through night's darkness;  
set up tents near water,  
breathed air pure as sound.

No gulf or expanse of water  
threatened our vision;  
no animal skirted our sight  
into the unknown.  
Everything was knowledge,  
accessible  
and defined as sunlight  
on our hands.

More than hundreds or millions of years  
will have passed,  
and all kindred will claim that earth  
never split, that it was always whole,  
that there was never rift nor river  
to break the earth's surface.

But the earth knows its painful birth,  
remembers its limbs torn and cracked,  
how animals frantic and desperate  
stampeded across its yawning chasms  
and folding mountains, and we  
who have forgotten,  
will stumble across  
it in our dreams  
as Wegener did,  
and wonder at the startling  
similarity of our thoughts  
as they traverse plains,  
come to edges,  
and fall softly, soundlessly,  
into the ocean's gleaming waters.

#### Focus Your Learning

Reading this poem will help you:

- visualize poetry
- recognize literary techniques
- understand the use of allusion

## Activities

1. Read the poem carefully looking for visual images. Create a series of cartoons or drawings representing the images.
2. Define the following terms: personification, metaphor, simile. Identify examples of the author's use of these figures of speech. For each example, consider how it affects the meaning of the poem, and how it deepens the reader's understanding of the theme. Explain why you think the author chose that particular technique.
3. Define the term allusion. What allusion does Sally Ito use in this poem? Talk with a partner about the poet's choice of allusion. How does it relate to the theme of the poem? Prepare a summary of your discussion to present to the class.

# Tlingit National Anthem

AS RETOLD BY ROBERT WILLARD JR.  
(RAVEN/BEAVER CLAN ELDER)



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this myth will help you:

- attend to details of place
- understand choices and outcomes
- write descriptively in the first person

This is the story of the Tlingit national anthem, a song that entwines our people with their past and keeps our ancient heritage alive. At potlatch ceremonies, Tlingit elders sing the anthem and tell how it came about—for many years in secret, for this ritual was long forbidden by the government—always passing the story on to the new generations.

Long ago, the Tlingit Indians lived in the area now called British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. They decided to move from this region of lakes to the great ocean—now called the Pacific—where they heard the fish were abundant. When all of the clans had assembled, they began a great trek through the mountain canyons leading to the sea.

After many, many miles, the way was blocked by a glacier that filled the canyon. To go back in search of a different route would be a long and wast-

ing journey, so the leaders, both women and men, climbed the mountain to look for a safe way around the ice; there was none. But they saw a stream, flowing from the narrow mouth of the glacier, which emptied into a great bay on the distant side. The passage under the glacier seemed too dangerous, the ice caverns too narrow to pass through. Determined to continue the migration to the ocean, the leaders met to plot a new course.

Then, four women stepped forward and volunteered to journey beneath the glacier. Two were barren, one was a widow, and the fourth was well along in years. Because the women had no children to nurture and protect, the leaders agreed to their risky plan. So the men built a raft of logs and the women set forth early next morning. With renewed hopes the leaders once again climbed the mountain, keeping watch all morning and into the afternoon.

Toward evening, they heard distant voices calling from the bay. It was the four women, waving their arms and shouting "We made it, we made it through, under the ice." Then, the youngest and strongest of the Tlingits set out for the other side. When they arrived, they began building large boats for the next part of the journey, and explored the region beyond the glacier for a safe place abundant in resources. Then, all of the Tlingit people followed behind them. After three days and three nights, they came through the ice caverns. So, they set up camps and rested.

The next day, the people asked the Great Spirit to be with them. They decided to row in all directions and settle as much unoccupied territory as possible. It was a sad, sad day as the people sang goodbye to their uncles and aunts and cousins and friends. They wept as they rowed, but it was the beginning of the Tlingit Nation, which today occupies more than twenty-three million acres of land and water in southeast Alaska. ■

## Activities

1. Use a map of the BC/Yukon/Alaska area to trace the possible journey of this group of natives. Draw your own version of the map and mark areas where you think they might have camped. Include on your map landmarks from the story, for example, the glacier, the mountain, the stream, the bay.
2. Create a decision-making chart to show the decisions the leaders of the group made along the journey. Show the alternatives and possible outcomes of each potential choice.
3. Write the story of one of the women who made the journey beneath the glacier. Write the story as the woman, in the first person. Describe your feelings and experiences. Show rather than tell, using descriptive words and images.

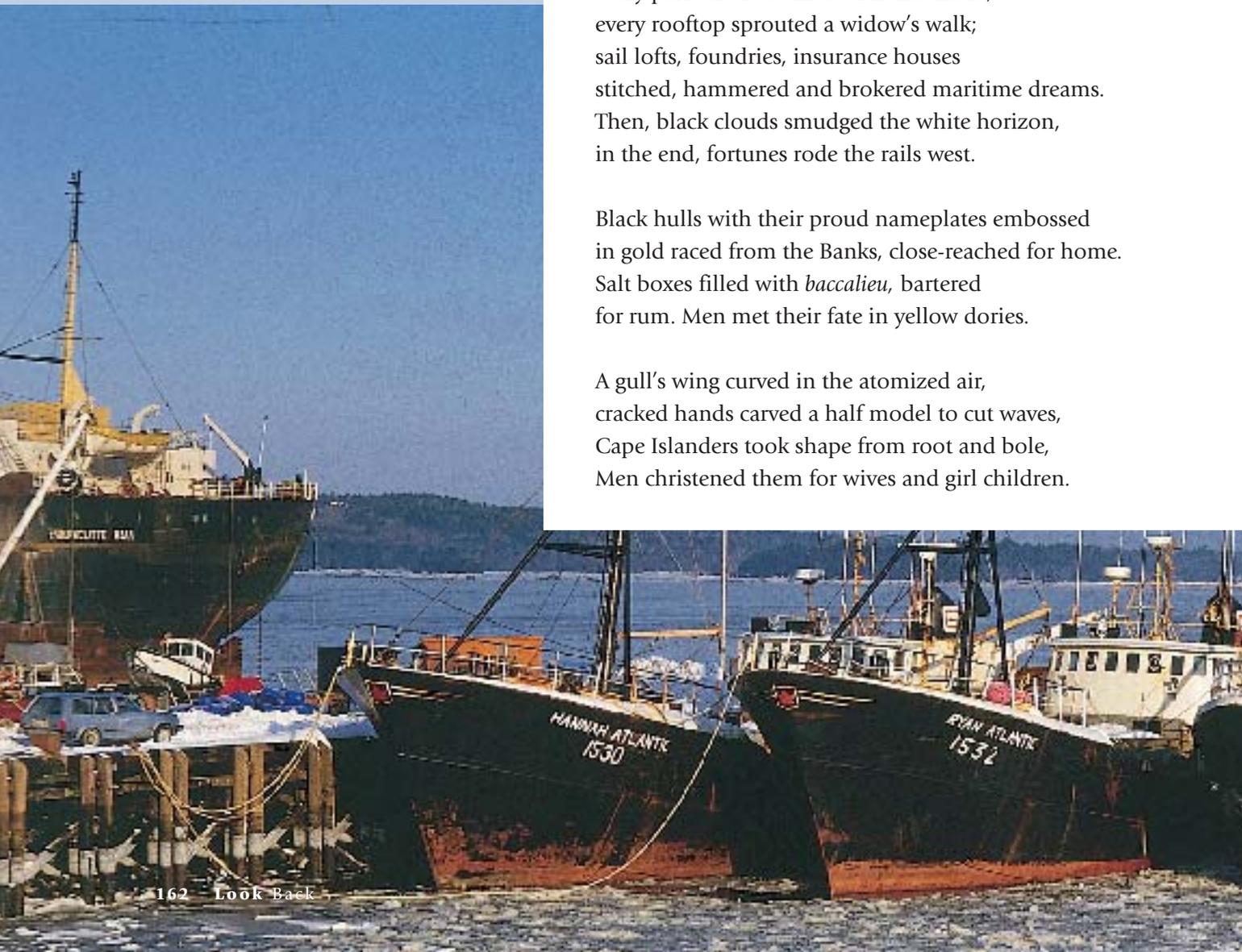
# Black Hull

FROM THE POEM "ATLANTIC ELEGY"  
HARRY THURSTON

The sea is memory. Forests of masts  
growing in the harbours, white pine with sails  
for leaves, reefed, expectant as held breath.  
Every mud creek bed cradled a keel,  
every ocean hailed a bluenose captain,  
every parlour blossomed with the exotic,  
every rooftop sprouted a widow's walk;  
sail lofts, foundries, insurance houses  
stitched, hammered and brokered maritime dreams.  
Then, black clouds smudged the white horizon,  
in the end, fortunes rode the rails west.

Black hulls with their proud nameplates embossed  
in gold raced from the Banks, close-reached for home.  
Salt boxes filled with *baccalieu*, bartered  
for rum. Men met their fate in yellow dories.

A gull's wing curved in the atomized air,  
cracked hands carved a half model to cut waves,  
Cape Islanders took shape from root and bole,  
Men christened them for wives and girl children.



Trawls ousted hook-and-line, bulged with fish  
 thrown overboard, time after time. All  
 so some restaurateur could serve a fillet  
 the size of his palm, caught to order,  
 some stockbroker could clip a coupon,  
 some politician could be elected.  
 Names old as the continent disappear,  
 fishers, fish-cutters become eco-refugees.  
 Now we have remembrance, rust, and rot,  
 bureaucracies and empty seas are our lot.

No longer do sage cod, big as gaffers  
 (Atlantic gods sporting pharaonic whiskers)  
 gather in our coves, waters thicken with eggs  
 like tapioca, beaches bear witness  
 to the strange love-making of capelin.

Seabirds drown in bilge oil, brass propellers  
 split open the last whales, fish spawn tumours.  
 We scrape the bottom for urchin, pick winkles,  
 dig bloodworms, strip the very rocks for weed,  
 in despair burn boats to the waterline—  
 wait, wait for what may never come again.



### Focus Your Learning

Reading this poem will help you:

- listen to others' interpretations
- create a choral reading
- explore human experiences

## Activities

1. Work with a partner to create three or four questions about the poem. Choose questions that require more than a yes or no answer. Take turns presenting the questions to the class, sharing answers, and listening attentively to others. Make sure the discussion makes reference to the poem to justify answers.
2. **a)** Form a small group and choose a stanza, so that each stanza is represented. Read your stanza carefully, discuss what is happening in it, and prepare a choral reading. Focus on word stresses, pauses, tone of voice, etc.  
**b)** Present the choral readings in the order they appear in the text. Discuss as a class how each of the different groups interpreted the mood of the poem in their presentation.
3. The poet explains how the fishing industry has changed over the years.  
**a)** Use a chart to help you organize the details of the changes, such as the one below:

Before	Now
	→
	→

- b)** Use the information from your chart to write a journal entry as if you were a fisherman/woman who can no longer fish. Compare your memories of the fishery with the reality of the fishery today.

# Irraweka, Mischief-maker

RETOLD BY  
PHILIP  
SHERLOCK



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this myth will help you

- relate the theme to your own experience
- compare two myths
- represent the theme visually

In the beginning there was friendship between man and all the animals. The Caribs who made their homes on the red-earth terraces between the brown river and the dark forest did not fear the jaguar, nor did the jaguar crouch at the sight of man, yellow-green flame in his eyes, anger coursing through his tense body, motionless but for the nervous flick of the tip of his tail.

In those days men did not hunt down the wild pig, nor did Mapuri seek refuge when his sharp ears caught the sound of man's naked feet on the carpet of grass and leaves.

Many of the animals worked for man in those far-off days. Parrot, perched on the high branch of a tree, preening his gaudy feathers and blink-

ing in the strong light, called out to the Carib sitting at the root of the tree, telling him the news of the world. The serpent went before man, showing him the quickest and easiest ways through the jungle. Dog and the great baboon and the giant sloth helped man, though often Sloth fell fast asleep in the middle of the work that he was doing. Even the restless, small brown monkey, Irraweka, gave man a hand.

And man helped the animals to find food. When, at Kabo Tano's command, he cut down the great tree and took cuttings from the trunk and branches, he did not forget the animals and their need. He knew that Mapuri felt thirst and hunger as he did, and the dog and jaguar, so he gave to all the animals pieces of the tree to plant as they wished, in the places where they dwelt.

But Irraweka hindered rather than helped, for he was always up to some trick. He pinched Mapuri the wild pig, pulled the tail of Abeyu the wild cow, shook the branch on which the parrot was balancing himself, leapt on the back of the jaguar dozing after lunch, and scolded Wise Owl for sleeping by daylight.

There came a time when Irraweka the mischief-maker nearly destroyed man and all the animals by interfering with man's work.

One day man went to the place where he had cut down the great tree and found a stream of water flowing fast from the root of the tree. Man was troubled, for the stream did not flow steadily like a river but swiftly, springing up as if it meant to cover the earth. To the rising water man said:

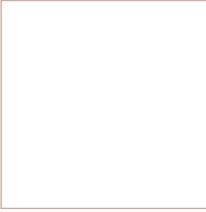
"O Stream, why are you flowing from the rest of the great tree, and why do you flow so swiftly?"

"I flow quickly because there is much to do," replied the stream. "Before the sun rises tomorrow I must cover the face of the earth."

Terrified, man called out to the Ancient One, asking him what to do. The Ancient One put it into man's heart to make a large basket from the reeds that grew nearby, and to cover with this the hole from which the water flowed. As soon as man placed the basket over the hole the flow of water ceased, and he went away content.

Now the brown monkey Irraweka saw man go into the forest in the direction of the great tree and he followed him. He saw man making the basket, and he watched from the far-off top of a cedar tree while man put the basket over the hole whence the water flowed, but he was too far off to hear what man said. He thought to himself: "Man is our master but he does not think of us. He keeps the best food for himself. He has hidden the best fruit beneath the basket. When he goes I will take away the basket and taste the food that man seeks to keep for himself."

After man had gone away, Irraweka removed the basket. The stream flowed faster than ever. Soon it grew into a river and then into a raging tor-



rent that swept away the terrified brown monkey, but not before the other animals heard his cries. Parrot, perched aloft, saw the river rising, saw Irraweka being swept away, and gave the alarm; and the animals cried out, "O Man, save us, save us."

Man saw what was happening. He knew that he was in peril and all the animals with him, so he led them to the top of a high hill, on which grew coconut trees, tall and deeply rooted.

"Climb the coconut trees," cried man. "Climb the trees quickly before the flood sweeps you away."

For five days all the animals and man lived in the top of the coconut trees, where the green branches spring from the trunk and the nuts grow. The rain fell and the water rose until no land could be seen. The sky was blanketed with dark clouds, and thick mist hid the world.

Now a strange thing happened. While the flood was rising, all the animals were frightened, and man also, but the baboon was more terrified than any other animal. In those days his voice was shrill, his throat small, but at the sound of the rising water lapping around the trunk of the coconut tree his shrill cries became hoarse shouts, his shouting became a loud roaring, and his throat grew to twice its former size. To this day all baboons have huge throats and the loudest voices in the forest.

Of a sudden, on the fifth night, there came stillness. The thunder and the lightning ceased. The rain stopped. The animals began to move from their places of refuge among the boughs of the coconut trees, but man bade them stay where they were, saying that they should wait until the day dawned. On the morning of the tenth day the sun rose, but mist still covered the earth, and from below the trees came the sound of lapping water. Man dropped a coconut, and listened. In a moment there was a great splash. The animals knew that the water was still high.

Each day man dropped a coconut and all the animals listened. At first, the sound of splashing was close below them. Two days later it seemed more distant. On the following day there was no sound of splashing, only a dull thud. The listening animals eagerly made ready to climb down from the trees, but man told them to stay where they were. He would climb down first to make sure that all was safe.

The trumpeter bird did not do as man bade. Tired of sitting on the boughs of the coconut tree, and proud of his long legs, he climbed down, while man shouted to him, "Be careful, be careful, come back; you do not know what lies below."

The trumpeter bird paid no heed. Climbing down quickly, he stepped into a nest of large ants that had buried themselves deep down within the earth while the rains were falling. Now they had come out of their hiding-place in search of food. Fierce with hunger, they bit at the long legs of the

trumpeter bird, stripping the flesh from them before man could rescue the bird. To this day the trumpeter bird mourns because his legs are so thin.

Following after man, the other animals climbed down to the earth, sodden and cold. The toucan shivered so much that his long beak made music like a pair of castanets. Wise Owl shivered with cold for all his warm grey feathers. Mapuri the wild pig, who loves mud, found for once that there was too much mud for his pleasure and tried desperately to find a dry place.

While the animals were shivering with the cold, man began to make a fire. He found two sticks, rubbed them together until they grew hot, and so kindled a flame. Strangest of all was the fate that befell the alligator, a grumpy, quick-tempered animal, much disliked because he was so greedy. Alligator was proud of his long tongue, using it to sweep food into his mouth before any other animal could eat his fill. He went to pay his respects to man, hoping to get some food, for he was hungry. It was just after the marudi bird had swallowed the coal of fire, and man was angry because the labour of a morning had been lost and he must start all over again, rubbing two stick together until he kindled a flame.

When the animals saw Alligator coming, they shouted, "Perhaps he took the fire! Perhaps it was Alligator who stole your coal of fire, sweeping it into his mouth with his long tongue!" At these words man forced Alligator to open his mouth, and Alligator, in fear, swallowed half his tongue. To this day the alligator has a shorter tongue than any other animal.

These things happened because of Irraweka, mischief-maker. Up to this time all the animals had one language. They could speak to each other and to man. From this time of the great rains and the flood they grew fearful of each other, and each animal refused to speak to any other but his own kind. The birds chirruped and sang to each other, the baboon roared to his mate, the parrot screeched and laughed in his own language, the wild cow Abeyu lowed, the wild pig Mapuri grunted, the jaguar snarled, and the wise owl hooted as he flew through the dusk on flapping wings. Because Irraweka removed the basket from the fast-flowing spring at the root of the great tree, man and the animals no longer understood each other. ■

## Activities

1. Many myths describe a time when humans lived in harmony with each other and with nature. As a class, discuss why you think this is the case. How is this sense of division expressed in our lives today?
2. With a partner, make a list of all of the natural phenomena which are explained in this myth. Research to find another myth that contains a similar explanation. Create a chart to compare the two myths.
3. Create a visual representation of this story, before and after the flood. Be prepared to offer an oral explanation of your interpretation.

# How Rocks Were Born

TRANSLATION BY LAWRENCE MILLMAN



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this myth will help you:

- write in the first person
- present and evaluate an oral interpretation
- experiment with techniques of scripting

Once upon a time there weren't any rocks in the world, only one very large boulder. Wolverine went over to this boulder and said, "I bet I can outrun you, friend."

To which the boulder replied, "That's probably true, for I can't run at all. In fact, I've been sitting in this same place for as long as I can remember."

"*Can't run?* But even Lemming can run. Even Ant can do it. You must be the lowest of the low, friend."

And with that Wolverine gave the boulder a strong kick. The boulder did not like this kick or Wolverine's insults, so it began rolling toward him.

"Well, at least you can *move*," Wolverine laughed, and he took off down a hill with the boulder rolling after him.

"Are you pleased now?" the boulder said.

"I am, but I wish you'd slow down. You're hurting my heels."

"I thought you wanted to see me run ..."

Suddenly Wolverine fell down, and the boulder rolled right on top of him. "Get off! You're breaking my body!" he yelled. But the boulder just sat there and went on breaking his body.

Now Wolverine called on his brothers to help him.

"Wolf, get rid of this boulder!"

"Fox, get rid of this boulder!"

Neither Wolf nor Fox would help him. They said it was only fair, since he'd insulted the boulder, that he be stuck under it.

"Frog, come here and help me get rid of this boulder!"

Frog tried to lift the boulder, but his hands were so slippery that he couldn't move it at all.

"Mouse, can you help me?"

"Sorry, brother," said Mouse, "but I'm too small."

At last Wolverine called on his brother Thunderstorm. Thunderstorm took one look at him and roared with laughter. "What are you doing under that boulder, brother?"

"Being silly again," sighed Wolverine. "Now will you please help me get up?"

Thunderstorm called on Lightning, who zigzagged down from the sky and struck the boulder *bamm!* It broke into many, many little pieces.

That's how rocks were born.

From then on Wolverine said only kind things to these rocks.

For he did not want his body broken again. ■

## Activities

1. Using information, ideas, and images from the story, write a diary entry as if you were the boulder. Include your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Focus on descriptive and powerful language. In a small group, read your diary entries to each other. Consider how the story changes when interpreted from another point of view. Does the meaning stay the same? Is it easier or more difficult to understand? Why?
2. Present the story orally. Work as a class to develop criteria for an effective oral interpretation, and come to a class consensus on the criteria for evaluating the oral readings. In small groups, assign roles for each character, plus a narrator. Practise reading your roles within the group, using praise and encouragement, as well as suggestions for improvement. Present your version to another group and evaluate each other according to the predetermined criteria.
3. Work with a partner to create a script for the movie version of this story. Include directions to the actors regarding tone of voice and emphasis. Also include information about lighting, camera angles, scenery, props, and dialogue to help maintain the mood and develop interest. (Directions should be in italics if a word-processing program is available, underlined if not.)

# Postcards to Pele

JAMES HOUSTON

## Focus Your Learning

Reading this article will help you:

- write collaboratively and independently
- create a story based on speculation
- write a newspaper story
- explore how point of view and format affect meaning

At the headquarters of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, rocks arrive nearly every day. They arrive in the mail, in packages large and small, ten or so in an average week. They come from New Jersey, from Florida, from Hong Kong, from L.A. and Dallas and Chicago. Some are black chunks as large as a horse's head. Some are merely pebbles or packets of black sand.

They arrive in tiny cardboard boxes tightly wrapped, like jewellery. They arrive in padded envelopes shipped via UPS or Air Express. The shipping charges can run to \$16—clear evidence that the enclosed souvenir became more trouble than it was worth and the time had come for the sender to *get this out of the house!*

Why are the rocks sent here? According to a myth of undetermined origin, if you pick up even one small shard of lava and carry it off, terrible things can happen to you. The word is *kapu*, a Hawaiian version of the more familiar Tongan word of warning, *tabu*. Since Hawaii is the island of the fire goddess Pele, there is a *kapu* on everything spewed from the volcanoes that have formed it. And Hale-ma'uma'u, Pele's traditional home, happens to be inside the boundaries of the park.

The letters tell the story. Some are addressed to "Superintendent" or simply "Park Headquarters." But others are addressed to Pele herself. The only thing I can think of that might be remotely akin to this is the annual

blizzard of letters kids send to Santa Claus, hoping they will reach the North Pole in time for Christmas. But these letters are not from kids. They're from adults. They are usually typed and rather formal. They are often detailed, full of a need to be understood, to be unburdened.

I recognize this need. I too once wrote to Pele, asking her forgiveness. My wife, Jeanne, encouraged me to do it. We composed the letter together. This was some time ago, a few days after we'd returned from a family trip. When no one else was looking, our youngest daughter, Gabrielle, then 11, had innocently picked up a Big Island souvenir to take back to her sixth-grade class. At home in Santa Cruz we set the rock on the kitchen table and looked at it. "If we keep this," Jeanne said, "probably nothing will happen. But you hear so many stories. I think we ought to send it back."

In Japan, where Jeanne's father came from, there is a long tradition of rocks that have to be attended to. She would call it part of her inheritance, a lingering, transpacific memory of the Shinto belief in nature deities that inhabit gardens, groves, creatures, ancestral stones.

"Sending it back can't hurt anything," I said.

Now I am flipping through this week's sheaf of letters, and touching the rocks heaped in the corridor—and I ask myself: How do you prove that something exists? In the realm of subatomic particles, it is often done by inference. *A* either occurs or does not occur, therefore *B* is probable. And so forth. The same is true for the elusive black holes at the farthest edge of observable space or the mysteries of acupuncture.

Here in the earth and in the air of the Big Island you have this presence called Pele. She has a home, visited regularly by local residents who talk to her and leave offerings at the brink

of the fire pit. I have heard chants dedicated to her, seen dances performed in her honour. I have now met people who claim to be descended from her. Many claim to have seen her—sometimes as a young woman, sometimes as an ageing crone—before and during eruptions. Books have been written about her, and at least one opera. And now, as visitors to this island continue to multiply, thousands of people send her mail. Clearly Pele is in a class by herself. Can there be another goddess, in the United States or elsewhere, with a zip code and a permanent mailing address?

*Dear Madame Pele: I am returning the lava I took from Black Sands Beach in 1969. I hope this pleases you, so my husband and I will have better luck on future trips ...*

*Dear Madame Pele: Your volcanic rock is enclosed. There is no return address on this because I don't want any return ...*

*Enclosed [writes a fellow from Cleveland] please find three small pieces of volcanic rock. I am not a superstitious person. However, in the last three years since I removed these from the Park, the following has occurred .... [His grim sequence of misfortunes includes the break-up of a marriage, the loss of a home, the wreck of a brand-new car.]*

Is it possible that chunks and bits of lava can actually carry ancient signals thousands of miles across the water? Reason of course says, No, a rock is a rock, and the rest is hocus-pocus. Yet it's not easy to dismiss the letters from people in faraway urban centres who live by the laws of concrete and spreadsheets and who, if pressed, would probably claim to know better.

Maybe it's superstition. Maybe it's a collective hallucination. Maybe it's a form of recognition. Behind the *kapu* is a Hawaiian reverence for their extraordinary island terrain. What the *kapu* tells

us is that these rocks have a natural place in the world, and maybe that's where they would like to remain. ■

## Activities

1. In your own words, define superstition. List superstitions that are commonly held, yet not really believed. For each superstition, speculate on reasons why it came into existence; for example, it's bad luck to walk under a ladder ... because a working person might drop something on your head. Use one of your superstitions to create a short oral story with your own explanation of how the superstition came into being. Present your story to the class.
2. The managers of the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park are worried they may be held liable for the problems tourists experience after stealing lava rocks. You are hired by the managers to create an advertising campaign to discourage theft of the rocks. Working in small groups, gather information from the article necessary to your campaign. Identify the main problem and brainstorm possible solutions that make use of advertising. Use persuasive strategies in your campaign. As each group presents to the class, give them feedback on good points and areas that need work.
3. Write a newspaper story in which someone has taken some lava rock from Hawaii. What are the consequences of this action? What events take place afterwards? Make sure you follow the conventions of a newspaper article: include who, what, where, when, why, and how; write a headline, sub-headings, columns; include a picture; etc.
4. Create a cartoon sequence with Pele as the main character. Through captions, show what she feels and thinks when tourists take her lava. Present your cartoons to a small group. Discuss how the message/meaning changes as the presentation of the information changes.

# Beside a Stone...

CHRISTINE M. KRISHNASAMI

beside a stone three  
thousand years old: two  
red poppies of today



## Focus Your Learning

This poem will help you:

- define haiku poetry
- create a haiku poem
- consider the use of imagery

## Activities

- a)** With a partner discuss what you know about Haiku poetry already. Look carefully at the poem and write some criteria for writing Haiku. Consider the number of syllables, themes, images, etc. Remember not to be specific about content.  
**b)** Using a dictionary of literary terms, find a definition of Haiku. Compare your own list of criteria with the definition, and make any changes you think are necessary. Share your criteria with others in the class and develop a class set of criteria for Haiku poetry.
- The author contrasts the image of the rock with the image of the poppy. Work with a partner and list as many contrasts as you can that are implied by this comparison. Share your contrasts with others in the class, and add any new possibilities to your list. Using the list to guide you, prepare a statement to suggest what impression the author wished to make.
- Write your own Haiku poem(s) about a subject of your choice. Use a thesaurus to help you develop strong images. Ask a partner to comment on your poem, and then post your finished haikus around the classroom.

# The Song of the Lambton Worm

ANONYMOUS

*This song is based on the legend of the Lambton worm. According to the medieval story, young John Lambton, while fishing, caught nothing but a worm, which he threw in the well. There, it grew and grew until it was a fearsome, hungry creature. When Lambton went off to fight in the Crusades, the worm crawled out of the well and started killing sheep, cows, and babies. When he returned, Lambton was horrified at what had happened. He was told that if he wanted to kill the creature, he would have to promise to slay the very next living thing he met after that. He killed the worm ... and then was warmly greeted by his own father. Because the young hero could not bring himself to carry out the promise and kill his father, the Lambton family was cursed with untimely deaths for nine generations.*



One Sunday morn young Lambton  
went a-fishin' in the Wear;  
An' caught a fish upon his huek,  
He thowt leuk't varry queer,  
But whatt'n a kind a fish it was  
Young Lambton couldn't tell.  
He waddn't fash to carry it hyem,  
So he hoyed it in a well.

**Chorus:**

*Whisht! lads, haad yor gobs,  
Aa'll tell ye aall an aaful story,  
Whisht! lads, haad yor gobs,  
An' aal tell ye 'bout the worm.*

Noo Lambton felt inclined to gan  
An' fight in foreign wars.  
He joined a troop o' knights that cared  
For neither wounds nor scars,  
An' off he went to Palestine  
Where queer things him befel,  
An' varry seun forgot about  
The queer worm i' the well.  
(Chorus)

But the worm got fat an' growed an' growed,  
An' growed an aaful size;  
He'd greet big teeth, a greet big gob,  
An' greet big goggle eyes.  
An' when at neets he craaled about  
To pick up bits o'news,  
If he felt dry upon the road,  
He milked a dozen coos.  
(Chorus)

This feorful worm wad often feed  
On calves an' lambs an' sheep,  
An' swally little bairns alive  
When they laid doon to sleep.  
An' when he'd eaten aal he cud  
An' he had had his fill,  
He craaled away an' lapped his tail  
Seven times roond Pensher Hill.  
(Chorus)

The news of this most aaful worm  
An' his queer gannins on  
Seun crossed the seas, gat to the ears  
Of brave an' bowld Sir John.  
So hyem he cam an' caught the beast  
An' cut 'im in three halves,  
An' that seun stopped he's eatin' bairns,  
An' sheep an' lambs and calves.  
(Chorus)

So noo ye knaa hoo aall the folks  
On byeth sides of the Wear  
Lost lots o' sheep an' lots o' sleep  
An' lived in mortal feor.  
So let's hev one to brave Sir John  
That kept the bairns frae harm  
Saved coos an' calves by myekin' haalves  
O' the famis Lambton Worm

Noo lads, Aa'll haad me gob,  
That's aall Aa knaa about the story  
Of Sir John's clivvor job  
Wi' the aaful Lambton Worm

**the Wear:** a river in Sunderland, in the north of England  
**waddn't fash:** wasn't keen  
**hoyed:** threw  
**haad yer gobs:** shut your mouths  
**swally little bairns:** swallow little babies  
**coo:** cow  
**myekin':** making  
**byeth:** both

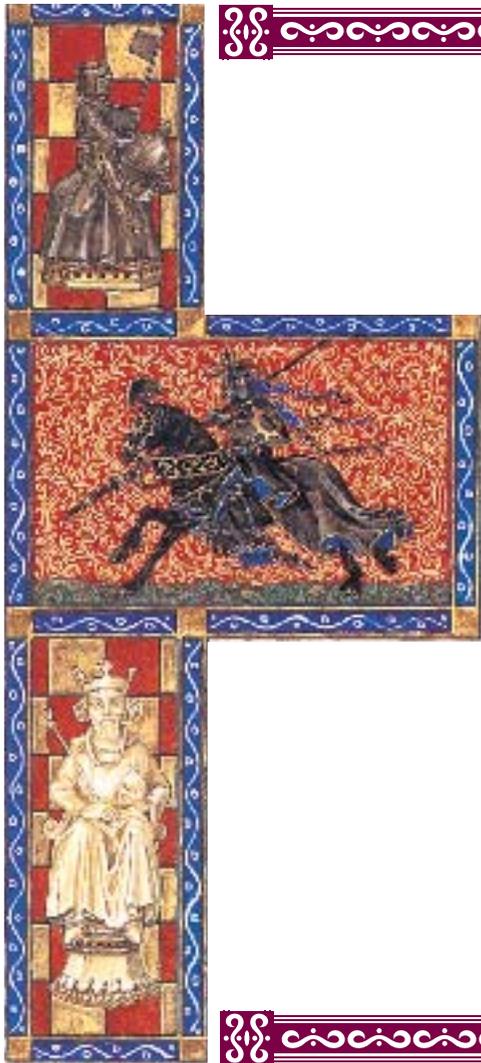
### Focus Your Learning

Reading this song will help you:

- recognize dialect and archaic language
- paraphrase a story
- explore publishing forms

## Activities

1. Work with a small group and pick a verse from the song. Practise reading the lines out loud, focussing on pronunciation and stresses. Present your verse to the class. Listen carefully to the other groups, thinking about how the expression affects your understanding of the story.
2. Retell the story to a friend in your own words. Listen to his or her version. Write your version of the story, recalling as many details as you can.
3. Create a mini-book for children based on the song. Divide the song to fit on the pages of the book. Create appropriate illustrations for the book.



# SIR GAWAIN and the LOATHLY LADY



Retold by SELINA HASTINGS

Illustrations by JUAN WIJNGAARD

## Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- review figurative language
- read for details
- develop and defend your opinion
- write alternate endings
- discuss stereotypes

King Arthur and his court had moved to the castle of Carlisle for Christmas. Every evening there was feasting and dancing, while by day the King and his knights rode out into the Inglewood to hunt. One morning the King, galloping fast in pursuit of a young stag, found himself separated from his companions, his quarry having outrun the hounds and disappeared. Reining in his horse, he saw that he was in an unfamiliar part of the forest, on the edge of a black and brackish pond surrounded by pine trees whose dark foliage obscured the light of day. Suddenly Arthur noticed in the shadows on the other side of the pond a man on horseback, watching him. The man was covered from head to foot in black armour, and he sat motionless on a charger which was itself as black as midnight.

All at once the stranger spurred forward, splashing through the muddy water toward the King. As he drew within hailing distance, he stopped.

“Arthur!” he shouted through his steel helmet. “I challenge you to fight!”

Your crown shall be mine. Come and defend it—if you can!” And the Black Knight threw back his head and laughed.

Arthur’s hand went instantly to his scabbard; but his great sword Excalibur, whose magic protected him from harm, was lying far away in Camelot. Arthur felt the strength drain from him. He sat helpless in the saddle as though turned to stone. Now he knew that he was in an evil place, and that his challenger was no ordinary foe.

“I have you now, Arthur Pendragon!” roared the Knight, pointing his lance straight at Arthur’s heart. Then he paused, seeming to consider, and the tip of his lance dropped a little. “But there is no pleasure in killing you too easily,” he went on. “I shall give you one chance to save both your kingdom and your life. Listen carefully. You must come back here in three days’ time, on New Year’s Day, with the answer to this question: what is it that women most desire? If you can tell me that,” and the Knight smiled to himself, “you will go a free man. If not, then you will die, and I shall be High King of Britain in your place!” With that the Knight wheeled around and was gone.

Gradually Arthur felt his strength return. As he rode slowly homeward, he thought over the riddle whose solution would save his life. What *was* it that women most desired? On the way, he stopped every woman he met—a goose girl, an abbess on a grey mare, a merchant’s fat wife with a retinue of servants—to ask what it was she most desired. And every one of them gave him a different answer.

When at last he reached the castle, to be greeted by Guinevere his Queen, he was careful to conceal the danger he was in, saying only that he had accepted a wager from an unknown knight to find within three days what it was that women most desired. The ladies of the court, pretty as peacocks in their brightly coloured silks and velvets, clustered around Arthur, eager to supply him with the answer. Some said beauty, some wealth, others wanted power or spiritual salvation. One lady, getting on in years, wished for a young husband. None could agree.

That night Arthur lay sleepless, his heart heavy at the thought of the terrible encounter in front of him. But true to his word he set off on New Year’s morning to meet the Black Knight, knowing that he still had not heard the answer to the riddle, and that unless a miracle occurred his life would be lost.

Cantering along a grassy ride on the outskirts of the forest, he heard a woman’s voice call his name, and looking around caught sight of a flash of red by the side of the road. Puzzled, Arthur drew up his horse and dismounted.

He walked back a few steps and saw in front of him, sitting on a tree stump, a woman in a scarlet dress. She looked up at him—and Arthur gasped.





She was the ugliest living thing he had ever set eyes on, a freak, a monster, a truly loathly lady. Her nose was a pig's snout; from a misshapen mouth stuck out two yellowing rows of horse's teeth; her cheeks were covered in sores; she had only one eye, rheumy and red-rimmed; and from a naked scalp hung a few lank strands of hair. Her whole body was swollen and bent out of shape, and her fingers, on which were several fine rings, were as gnarled and twisted as the roots of an old oak.

"My lord King," said the hag in a surprisingly sweet voice, "why do you look so dismayed?"

Quickly Arthur explained that he had been deep in thought, and he told the Loathly Lady about his quest, how he was honour-bound to accept the Black Knight's challenge, and how, without the answer to the question, he was sure to die. The Lady laughed.

"I can answer your question," she said. "There's no mystery to that! But if I do, you must promise to grant me one wish—whatever that wish may be."

"Madam, you have my word," the King eagerly replied. "*Anything* you ask shall be yours."

The Lady whispered a few words in his ear. And then Arthur knew with absolute certainty that he had nothing more to fear. Joyfully he turned to go, but the Lady caught his sleeve.

"Now for your side of the bargain," she said, still holding him by the sleeve. "My request is this: you must give me one of your knights to be my husband."

Arthur turned pale. One of his brave knights of the Round Table to take this hell-hag for a wife! "Madam, that I cannot do! You are asking the impossible!"

"A king never breaks his word," said the Lady. And still her hand was on his arm.

"Your pardon, madam. I shall keep my promise. I will return here tomorrow bringing with me your future husband." Arthur bowed and turned quickly away, full of horror at the thought of what he must do, and ashamed, too, of his lack of courtesy toward the Loathly Lady.

But first he must complete his quest. Briskly he rode on through the forest until he came to the pond where the Black Knight waited. As before the Knight was sitting on his great charger, deep in the shadows of the trees. He watched Arthur approach, his lance lifted in a mocking salute.

"Well, Arthur Pendragon, High King of Britain, have you come to surrender your kingdom?"

"I have the answer to your question," Arthur quietly replied. For a moment there was silence: no bird song, no rustle of movement on the forest floor, not even the chink and creak of harness. "What all women most desire is to have their own way."

When he heard these words, the Black Knight let out a bellow of rage that rang throughout the Inglewood. "God curse you, Arthur! You have tricked me of my prize!" And with that he plunged off into the trees.

That evening Arthur sat before the fire in the great hall of the castle, gazing miserably into the flames. His life had been saved, but at a high cost. How could he condemn one of his knights to the embraces of the Loathly Lady? And yet he must keep his word. Guinevere, worried by her husband's melancholy air, knelt beside him, taking his hand in hers, and asked him the cause of his distress.

"My honour is at stake," he said. "I do not know how I may save it."

Sir Gawain, the youngest of the company, was sitting close by playing chess. On hearing Arthur's words he leapt up, scattering the ivory chessmen at his feet. "Sire, I beg you, let *me* defend you! Grant *me* the quest, that I may be the one to save the honour of my King!"

Arthur loved this knight, always the first to come forward, ever ready to put his courage to the test; and his heart sank. He saw Gawain's youth, his face so full of innocence and hope, and he remembered the frightful features of the Lady in the forest. But Arthur had no choice. Taking a deep breath he began the tale of his meeting with the Black Knight, of the challenge, and of how the Loathly Lady came to his rescue, of her terrible deformity, and the price she demanded for saving his life. As he talked, the other knights and their ladies drew near to listen. When he had finished, not a word was spoken. Those who were married looked thankfully at their wives; those who were not prayed that the young man's courage would not desert him.

Gawain looked stunned, but his spirit never faltered. "Take me to her, Sire," he said. "I will marry her tomorrow."

Then next morning Arthur and Gawain, with Sir Kay, the King's steward, and a small company of knights escorting a richly decorated litter, set out for the Forest of Inglewood. The day was crisp and bright and the sun shone in a cloudless sky, but the little band was melancholy. All too soon Arthur caught sight of the flash of scarlet, and there she was, the Loathly Lady, sitting on her tree stump by the side of the road. Arthur dismounted and kissed the gnarled hand she held out. Behind him the knights sat still as statues, hardly able to believe their eyes.

"Good God, Sire!" burst out Sir Kay, never famous for the kindness of his tongue. "The woman's a monster! We can't bring *her* to live among the ladies of our court!"

Before Arthur could rebuke his steward, Gawain jumped down from his horse and knelt before the Lady. "Madam," he said, "will you honour me with your hand in marriage?"

"Oh, Sir Gawain, not you. Have you, too, come to mock me?" said the





Lady. But when she looked into the knight's honest face, she knew he had spoken sincerely, so she gave him her hand and let him lead her to the litter which was waiting to carry her to the castle.

As the little party rode through the narrow streets of the town, the Lady hid her face in her hands so none could see her ugliness. But when they reached the castle yard, she was obliged to step into view, and trembled as she heard the gasps of horror that greeted her appearance. Only Guinevere appeared to notice nothing; she gave no shiver of disgust as she welcomed the poor monster and took her hand to lead her to the bridal chamber. For Gawain and the Lady were to be married that night.

The wedding of Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady was a dismal occasion. Gawain moved as though in a trance, and not all the jewels nor the fine velvet robe given her by the Queen could disguise the hideousness of the bride as she stumbled through the great hall on the arm of her husband. After the ceremony there was a feast; but no one had the appetite to eat. And after the feast the musicians began to play; but no one had the heart to dance. Then Gawain seemed to shake himself awake, and gently leading his wife into the centre of the hall, he guided her through the slow steps of a courtly measure. Arthur followed with Guinevere, and then all the knights with their ladies, so that the grotesque sight of the limping, lurching Loathly Lady should not remain thus pitifully exposed.

As midnight struck, and the hour could no longer be postponed, the King and Queen dismissed the company, and then escorted the couple to their chamber. Arthur gloomily embraced Gawain and wished him a good night, while Guinevere kissed the bride on both her pitted cheeks—and then they left them, alone together.

The chamber had been decorated with fresh leaves; sweet-smelling rushes were strewn on the floor; the great carved bed, hung with velvet, was covered in soft furs. But Gawain saw none of this. With a groan he flung himself into a chair in front of the fire. What was he to do? What did the code of chivalry demand? Was he to spend the rest of his life shackled to a creature more hideous than the demon of a nightmare? Just then he heard the rustle of silk behind him, and his wife's sweet voice: "Will you not come to bed, my lord?"

Shuddering with horror he slowly turned his head. Standing before him was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She had long golden hair hanging to her waist, her figure was slender as a fairy's, her pale skin as perfect as a piece of polished ivory.

Slowly placing her arms about his neck, she kissed him gently on the cheek. "I am your wife, Sir Gawain. This is the Loathly Lady whom you see before you. By marrying me you have half-released me from a spell which doomed me to that disgusting shape in which King Arthur found me. But

only half-released." She looked down and sadly sighed. "I must return to that foul form for half of every day unless you can answer me one question."

"My wife," whispered Sir Gawain wonderingly, gazing at the Lady's lovely face. "My dearest wife, what is your question?"

"You must tell me this: would you rather have me beautiful by day and hideous by night? Or would you have me beautiful at night, as I am now, and my old ugly shape during the day?" The Lady took a step back, and regarded Gawain intently.

"Oh, my love, how can I tell?" said Gawain, distracted by the choice before him. Then, recalling that it was his wedding night, and drawing near to take her in his arms, he said, "Come to me at night beautiful as you are now."

The Lady frowned, and took another step back. "That is strangely uncharitable of you, sir. Do you condemn me to the contempt of the whole court, to be mocked and despised everywhere I go, unable to let darkness hide my shame? That is not what I expect a loving husband to wish for me, that I should suffer in this way!"

"Oh, forgive me," cried Gawain, penitent. "That was cruelly thoughtless of me. Be beautiful by day, my love, and at night resume your old shape." He held out a hand to her.

But still the Lady was not pleased; she did not take his hand. "Oh, husband," said she, "do you love your wife so little that you care not how vile she looks lying beside you? Are you so indifferent as to be content with an ugly witch as the companion of your private hours? do you not consider *my* feelings at having to come to you every night repellent and deformed?"

Gawain, at a loss for words, hung his head. Whichever choice he made—by day, by night—was wrong. "Madam, I am unable to answer your question. I must leave it to you. *You* must choose whichever you prefer."

At this the Lady laughed and clapped her hands with joy. "That," she cried, flinging her arms about his neck, "is the right answer to my question. You have given me what every woman wants—her own way. And now the spell is broken. You will never see that hideous old hag again. I am my true self—and will be yours for ever."

The next morning Arthur, anxious to know how Gawain had survived the night, wondered that such a reluctant bridegroom should stay in his chamber so late, expecting rather that he would leave the side of his Loathly Lady as soon as courtesy allowed. But when at midday Gawain finally appeared, leading his bride into the hall, Arthur wondered no more. The pair were so happy and so much in love. Now he saw that all was well—his kingdom safe, the Lady free of her enchantment, and ahead of them a night of celebration such as the castle of Carlisle had never known before. ■



## Activities

1. Review the definitions of simile, metaphor, and alliteration. Find examples in the story and create an illustration for each example. In your opinion, has the author used figurative language effectively? Discuss with a small group where figurative language is used well, and where it could be improved.
2. Pretend you are King Arthur. Write a reference letter for Sir Gawain. Describe the qualities that would make him a good employee, his previous work experience, and your personal assessment of him. Use examples from the story to justify your judgments.
3. Write the story of the Loathly Lady explaining how she came to be condemned to live as the “monster.” Or write a new ending to the story. If Sir Gawain doesn’t marry her, what happens to the kingdom?
4. Work in a small group to prepare a debate. Support or refute this statement: The story “Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady” presents a stereotypical view of women. Use examples from the text to support your argument. Present to the class.

# Habitant Farm

CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF



National Gallery of Canada.

## Activities

- What is the focus of interest in this painting?
  - What evidence from the painting backs up your response?
  - Draw a thumbnail sketch of the painting showing why you think the focus of interest is located where you suggest.
- Which people in the painting have the artist's sympathy? What evidence suggests this?
- Develop a short story describing what is happening here from the point of view of one of the characters.
  - Share your story with a group. Ask for suggestions for improvement.
  - Listen to and give constructive feedback about another student's story.

### Focus Your Learning

Working with this visual will help you:

- discuss and explain
- evaluate
- tell an oral story
- provide constructive feedback

# The Highwayman

ALFRED NOYES

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.  
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.  
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,  
And the highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

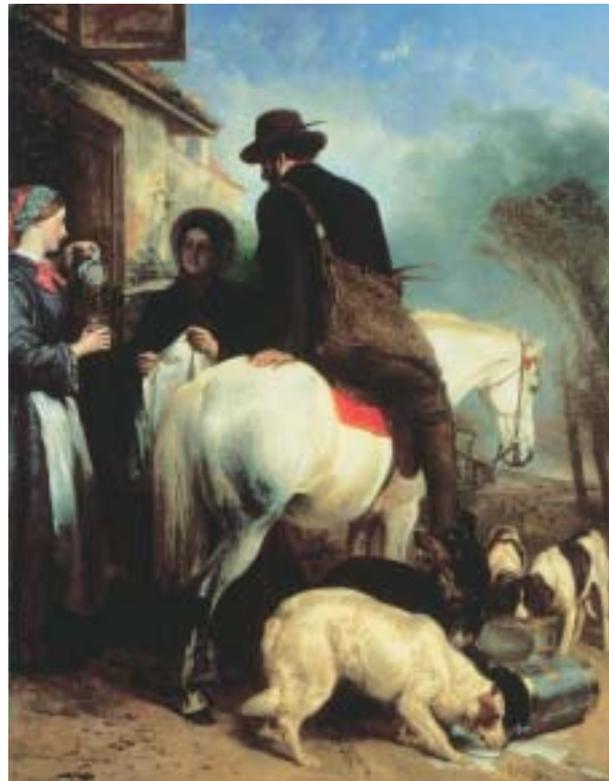
He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,  
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.

They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up to the thigh.

And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,

His pistol butts a-twinkle,

His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this poem will help you:

- determine rhyme scheme
- interpret the poem visually
- explore characterization

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard.  
He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred.  
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
    Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked  
Where Tim the ostler listened. His face was white and peaked.  
His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,  
But he loved the landlord's daughter,  
    The landlord's red-lipped daughter.  
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,  
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;  
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,  
Then look for me by moonlight,  
    Watch for me by moonlight,  
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach her hand,  
But she loosened her hair in the casement. His face burnt like a brand  
As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;  
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,  
    (O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)  
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon;  
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,  
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,  
A red-coat troop came marching—  
    Marching—marching—  
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his ale instead.  
But they gagged his daughter, and bound her to the foot of her narrow bed.  
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!  
There was death at every window;  
    And hell at one dark window;  
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that *he* would ride.



They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.  
They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath her breast!  
“Now, keep good watch!” and they kissed her. She heard the doomed man say—

*Look for me by moonlight;*

*Watch for me by moonlight;*

*I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!*

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!  
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!  
They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years,

Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,

Cold, on the stroke of midnight,

The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more for the rest.  
Up, she stood at attention, with the muzzle beneath her breast.  
She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;  
For the road lay bare in the moonlight;  
Blank and bare in the moonlight;  
And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot!* Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs ringing clear;  
*Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot,* in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?  
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,  
The highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The red-coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still.

*Tlot-tlot,* in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing night!

Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.

Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,

Then her finger moved in the moonlight,

Her musket shattered the moonlight,

Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with her death.

He turned. He spurred to the west; he did now know who stood  
Bowed with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own blood!  
Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey to hear  
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
    The landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high.  
Blood-red were his spurs in the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat;  
When they shot him down on the highway,  
    Down like a dog on the highway,  
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of lace at his throat.

*And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,  
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,  
A highwayman comes riding—  
    Riding—riding—  
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.*

*Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard.  
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred.  
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
    Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.*

## Activities

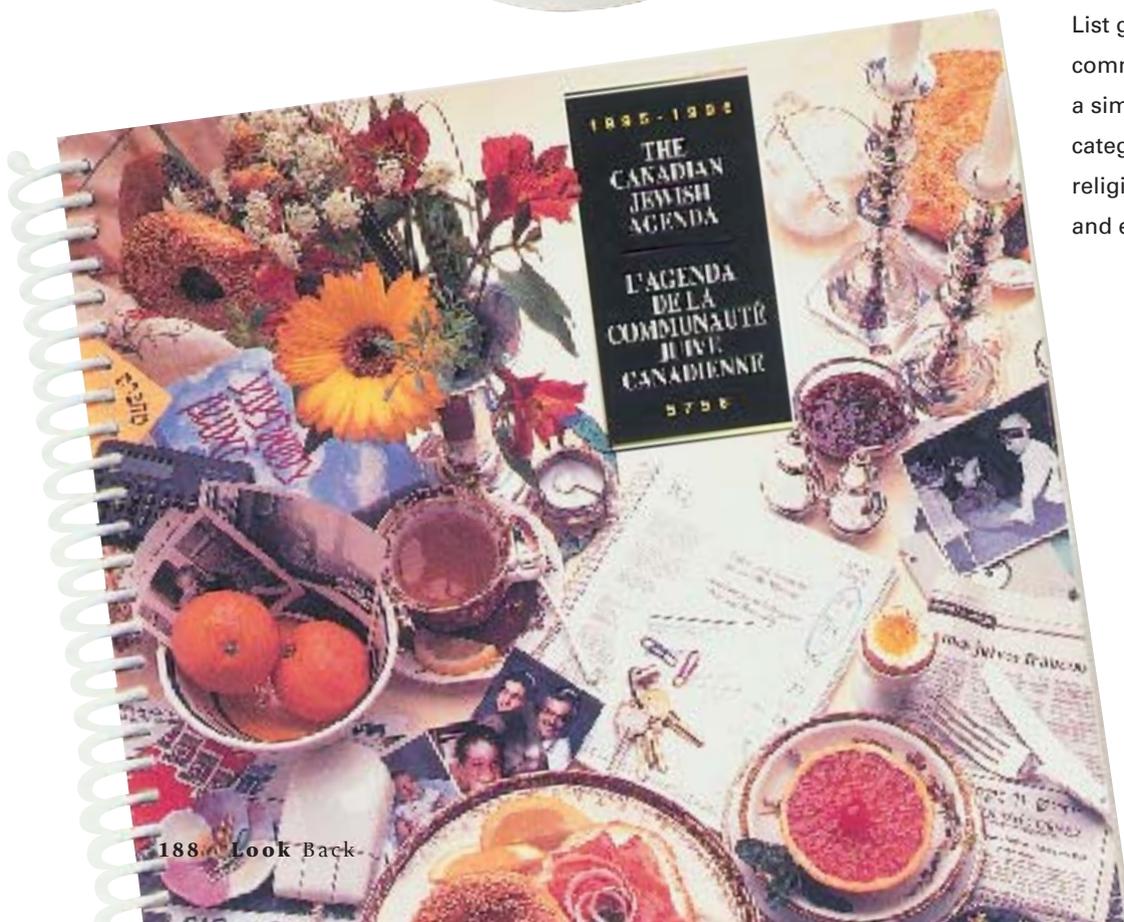
1. Working in pairs, each student reads a stanza from the poem aloud to his or her partner. Note interesting words that your partner stresses when reading aloud. Note the words that rhyme and determine the rhyme scheme for the poem.
2. Pick one of the stanzas to illustrate. Make sure your illustration includes all the details and description used in the stanza.
3. Tim's plan to get rid of his rival backfired. Write a journal entry as if you were Tim, describing your actions and their consequences. Make sure you include details of what he did, and his thoughts and feelings about what happened.

# Messages Are Everywhere



- 
- Create a list of all the souvenirs that you can find in your home. Using the list, write a brief paragraph on why you think people collect souvenirs. Are all souvenirs symbols?

- 
- Many people in Canada belong to affiliations which meet regularly to share ideas, to support one another, and to work together in the community. List groups in your community that meet with a similar purpose and categorize them into religious, cultural, political, and educational groups.

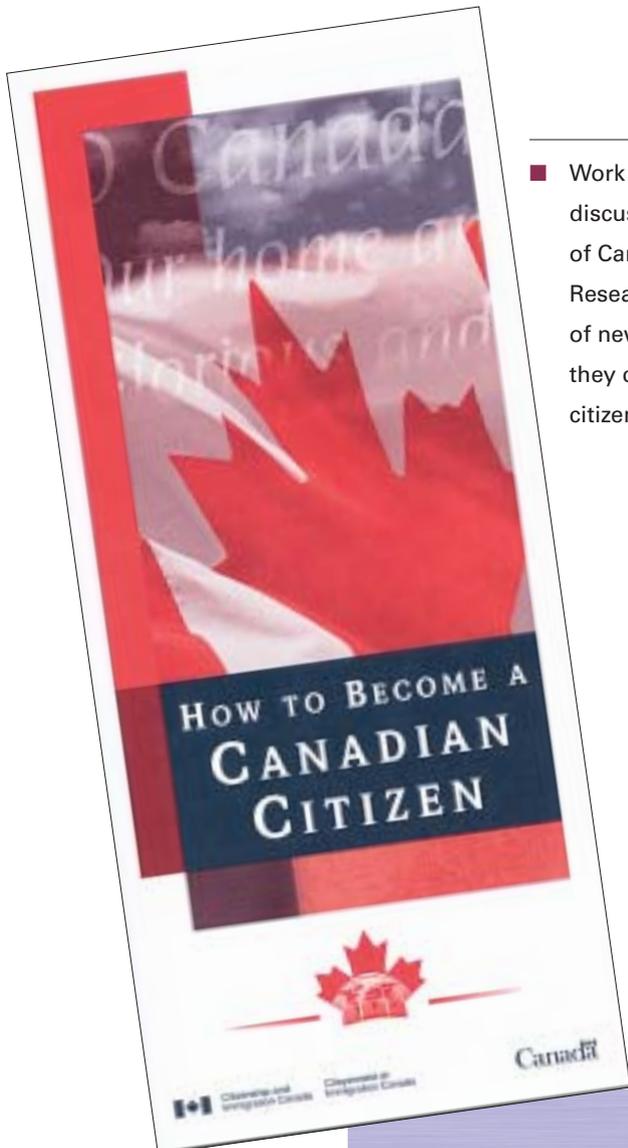


## RECENT IMMIGRANTS by country of last residence\*

AFRICA	13,460	14,598	14,862	14,226	14,649
ASIA	146,629	135,509	133,912	148,198	115,475
INDIA	19,450	15,802	19,511	20,764	17,572
HONG KONG	41,524	39,873	28,500	29,516	12,115
PHILIPPINES	20,919	16,745	14,165	11,775	7,799
EUROPE	40,072	41,110	41,166	37,506	41,225
WEST INDIES	12,365	9,546	9,999	8,410	7,596
SOUTH AMERICA	8,102	8,279	6,534	5,582	5,618

\*From July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next year  
Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Matrix 2

- What features of Canada and the Canadian people would make it an appealing destination for immigrants? What drawbacks or obstacles do immigrants to Canada face?



- Work in small groups to discuss the full meaning of Canadian citizenship. Research what is required of new immigrants before they can become Canadian citizens.



- Individuals use many ways to commemorate important events in their lives. What events and people are commemorated on the money you have in your pocket or purse? Choose one of these events or people. Research to get more information. Create your own visual commemorating that person or event.

# In the Silence

PEGGY S. CURRY



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- attend to details of setting
- write instructions
- recognize a dynamic character
- develop an understanding of theme

Daylight was there at his eyes before it seemed he'd been asleep. Then he saw the big foot by the tarp-covered bedroll, and the foot moved to prod him again. "Are you sleepin' all day?" demanded Angus Duncan.

Jimmy McDonald sat up and blinked at the big red-haired man who towered above him. Then he reached into the breast pocket of his heavy wool shirt and his chapped fingers brought out the silver brooch with its glinting purple jewel. He'd worn the brooch on his kilt when he left the hills of Scotland to come to Wyoming and learn the sheep business.

"Ah, that miserable glass and cheap silver," Angus Duncan muttered. "What kind of a never-grow-up are you when you must carry a trinket in your pocket?"

Jimmy couldn't answer. There was no way to put into words what he felt about the brooch. It meant home, the home he'd left to be under the guid-

ance of this distant cousin of his father, the home he hadn't seen for two years. *Aye, that was a green and wonderful land across the ocean*, Jimmy thought, trying to stretch himself awake. *Not mean country like this with its late, cold spring and its mountain always there, frowning down on you.*

Jimmy shivered. Already he feared the mountain that lowered above the campground almost as much as he feared Angus Duncan. Terrifying tales were told of those who lived too long alone on the mountains. "In the silence," the herders called it, and sometimes, they said, a man too long in the silence was daft for the rest of his lifetime.

"Get up and stir the sheep," Angus Duncan said now. "Lambs should be at their breakfast before we start them up the mountain. Then we'll not have the ewes hiding from us among the rocks and brush to feed their young."

Jimmy bent to pull on his boots. Finally he stood, tall for his fourteen years, and looked up at Angus Duncan. "And what's my wages for sitting the summer alone on the mountain with your sheep?"

Angus Duncan's frosty blue eyes looked down on him from under the heavy red eyebrows and the stern mouth moved at the corners in what might have been a smile. "Not content with grub and decent blankets anymore, eh? Well, I'll tell you—" Angus Duncan paused and looked at the mountain, its pines still black against the first morning light.

"Your summer's wages," Angus Duncan said at last, "will be the long-tailed lambs."

A terrible empty ache began in Jimmy's stomach. "But—they can die. The coyotes can kill them, and the wild range horses run over them, trampling them. I—I could work the whole summer and have nothing left to show for it."

Angus Duncan grunted. "Well said for a lad that's slow to grow up. You've spoken the truth, and the truth can be a hard thing to face. If you save the lambs, you'll beat the best herder's wages. If you lose them, you've yourself to reckon with."

So Angus Duncan was laying out a hard lot for him, a mean job, and Jimmy recalled saying as much when he'd asked Angus Duncan to let him stay another month on the prairie with the other herders in their comfortable canvas-roofed wagons. "Let me stay with them," Jimmy had said. "Let me move to high country when they do."

Angus Duncan had laughed in his face. "Does a boy learn sheep business by sitting with old men under shelter? Why, when I was ten years old, I trailed to the Big Horn Mountains ..."

Now, in the cold of this June morning, Jimmy went to where the sheep were bedded on the gentle slope that marked the beginning of the mountain. As he moved among them, they stirred like old grey stones coming



suddenly to life and got up and stretched and nudged their sleeping lambs. These were the dock-tailed lambs, tails cut on the level prairie and with their legs already strong for the mountain trip.

He looked carefully for the swollen ewes, their bellies like grey barrels; the late lambs would run to sixty or seventy. *Aye*, he thought, *if I could keep only half I'd be a man of wealth*. But his lambs would be the late catches, born far from the familiar ground of the drop herd, prey to coyotes, early snowstorms that hit the mountain, and the salt-hungry horses that ran wild on the open range. Far from the world his lambs would be, brought to life near the sky, with no one to help him keep them from harm.

Jimmy's shoulders sagged as he moved toward the small fire with its smoke and fragrance of coffee. Angus Duncan silently handed him a tin plate, and they ate without speaking to each other, then loaded the packhorses and put saddles on the riding horses. On the packhorses were Jimmy's supplies for the summer—a tent, a small teepee, sacks of salt for the sheep, food, and bedding.

It took five hours to get the sheep on the mountain, moving them slowly along the narrow paths between trees and rocks. But the dogs worked well. Jimmy and Angus walked, leading the horses, and it was hot before they nooned up in the high country. They rested while the sheep were quiet and in the afternoon moved them across the broad back of the mountain to where the snowdrifts still lay with their adjoining pools of water. Here the sheep would drink while there was water, and later use the springs that sometimes went dry by the end of summer.

"You'll set up your main tent here," Angus Duncan said, "and come back for food and to water the sheep. At night set up your teepee by the bed ground. I'll be back in a couple of weeks to move you on a bit. And one day, if you keep your wits about you, I'll let you be a camp mover instead of a herder."

*He'll make me no camp mover, when my long-tailed lambs are dead*, Jimmy thought bitterly. *I'll be at the herding till I'm an old man if all the wages I get are long-tailed lambs*. And in anger he said loudly, "Why do you come up here so soon—snow still on and nights like the middle of winter and not a soul to keep me company? I see no other sheep outfits up here."

"The early sheep get the best grass and plenty of water," Angus Duncan said. "You'll have company by July—and the finest lambs." Then Angus nodded to himself and rode away, leading the packhorses.

The silence of the mountain seemed to grow out of the grass and trees until it came to stand all around Jimmy. His heart beat loudly and sweat broke out on his body. He called to the sheepdogs, his voice sounding strange and hollow, then went into the tent where the small stove, left from last year's early camp, had been set up. He put his bacon in a white sack

and hung it high in a tree, for the flies wouldn't go high in the wind or the thin air. He stacked his canned goods in the corner and put other groceries in a box with a strong catch to keep it shut. Here he had his flour, salt, sugar, baking powder, soda, and sourdough mix.

The silence kept coming into the tent while he worked. And suddenly he felt an overwhelming desire for candy. But Angus Duncan wasn't one to feed his herders anything sweet. Plain food, Angus Duncan always said, kept a man lean and strong and did no harm to his teeth.

*Forget about teeth*, Jimmy thought, finding a can of condensed milk and punching holes in it with his pocketknife. Then he got a tin cup and filled it with snow from a drift near the tent. He poured canned milk over the snow and covered this with sugar. He ate greedily. *Maybe the silence won't bother so much with a full belly.*

Jimmy set up a small teepee near where the sheep were gathering to bed down for the night. "Don't bull the sheep about their bed ground," Angus had cautioned. "They know better than you where they'll sleep best." He set his .22 rifle in the corner of the teepee. It was a single-shot and Angus Duncan had said, "Enough gun for you, and see you don't ventilate a leg or foot with it. Nobody'll be around to bandage your bleeding."

*No*, Jimmy thought, feeling cold, *there is nobody around.*

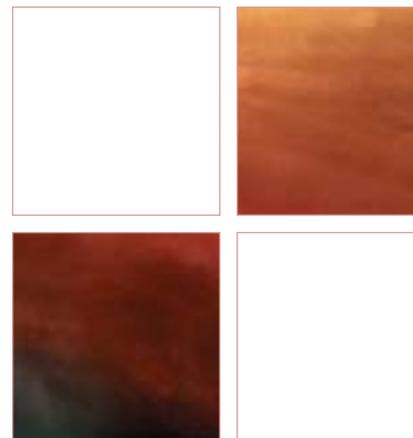
Two of the late lambs were born just before twilight and no sooner had the mothers licked their faces clean and the yellow saddles of membrane started to dry on their backs than the coyotes began howling.

Jimmy hurried to build fires around the bed ground, heaping up broken tree limbs and sagebrush, swinging the axe until his arms ached. When darkness came, he lighted the fires that circled the sheep. The thin, eerie *yip-yapping* of the coyotes rang out from time to time. Jimmy got his gun and walked around the bed ground. Once he saw coyotes at the edge of the firelight, their eyes glowing red, and he rushed toward them, the gun ready. They slipped away into the darkness.

He slept little that night, curled half in and half out of the teepee, the rifle close beside him. And it wasn't until the sheep nooned up that he felt free to lie down among the sagebrush and sleep deeply, the sun pouring over him.

He wakened to the thunder of horses' hooves and sat up blinking. He knew before he saw them come racing out of the trees into the open plateau that these were the wild range horses. Some had broken away from corrals and jumped fences and had run for years on open ranges. Now they wandered onto the mountain and were crazy in their need for salt, for there no salt sage grew.

While he screamed and groped for rocks to throw, they thundered past him, scattering the sheep. When they had gone, one of his new long-tailed



lambs lay trampled and bloody and dead. He put out more salt for the sheep and vowed to shoot the range horses if they came back.

That night Jimmy again built fires to keep away the coyotes and from time to time paced around the bed ground. Five late lambs came during the night. The wind blew in from the north, spitting rain, but this he didn't fear as much as the coyotes or the range horses. There was shelter for the new lambs under the big sagebrush, and Angus Duncan had told him that sheared ewes died from cold more easily than lambs. From the moment of breath, the lamb was at home in the chill, Angus said, but the sheared ewe was without the cover she'd grown used to and couldn't stand much cold.

When the sheep nooned again, Jimmy was in need of sleep, but now the great silence of the mountain plagued him more than weariness. He got on his saddle horse and rode quickly to the rim of the mountain where he could look down on the prairie and see the white-roofed sheepwagons of other herders.

It was almost like talking to another person to see the wagons. He reached in his shirt pocket and took out the silver brooch he'd worn on his kilt in that long-ago time when he'd left Scotland. He turned the brooch in his hand, as though the faraway herders could see it shining. The silence roared in his ears.

At last he rode back to the big tent near the melting snowdrift. He unsaddled the horse and put hobbles on him. Then he noticed the big footprints where the ground was moist near the water hole. *He was not alone in the silence.*

Jimmy ran to the tent, shouting, "Hey there!" But his voice seemed to bounce back at him from the canvas walls and he saw that the tent was empty. Disappointment filled him. It was surely a strange thing that a man would not stay and talk with him. In such a big, lonely country men didn't pass up the opportunity to talk to one another.

The silence of the mountain came pouring into the tent. He closed the tent flap as though to shut it out, but gigantic and real, the silence was there, all around him. *I must take hold of myself*, he thought. *I must look after the sheep.* And after a while the big silence ebbed out of the tent, much the way a tide draws back from the shore.

That night the coyotes were bad, circling the fringe of the lighted fires and making the sheep restless. Doggedly, Jimmy kept the fires going and walked around and around the ring of bedded sheep. Once he stopped and stared, for he was sure he had caught a glimpse of a man at the edge of the firelight. Then, it seemed, the man faded away. Queer little prickles ran up the back of Jimmy's neck. *Am I going daft?* he wondered.

At the end of ten days Jimmy was thin and hard, and his eyes, red from wind and sun, burned fiercely in his taut young face. Loneliness was in him,



filling him like a bitter food he couldn't digest. Periodically the silence dropped over him in a smothering cloud and within it he'd stand, trembling and sweating. Once it was so terrifying he dropped to his knees and clutched the sagebrush to assure himself of his own reality.

There were now fourteen of the small long-tailed lambs. The bold, brassy blue sky mocked him, and out of it came the big eagles, plummeting down toward the new lambs. Sometimes he ran, shouting, to frighten them away. Sometimes he shot at them. Once, on the far side of the herd from where he stood, an eagle got a lamb, soared high with it, and dropped it. Returned and soared again and dropped it. By the time the eagle came in for the third catch, Jimmy was close enough to shoot at it. The eagle went away, but when Jimmy got to the lamb, the life had gone.

In these days that became more dream than reality, he ceased to hate Angus Duncan. He knew if Angus Duncan were to ride out of the aspen trees, now coming green in a quick mist, he'd run to the big man as though he were a lad again and running to his father.

On a late afternoon, when the wind was down and the shadows were long from the rocks and trees, a man came suddenly and stood by the big tent, a man with a gun in a bloody hand. There was something terrible and frightening about him; it breathed out of his dirty clothes, the blood on his hand, the mad light in his eyes.

He said clearly to Jimmy: "I've come to take the long-tailed lambs. The coyotes will get them anyhow."

Blinding anger came up in Jimmy. He tried to collect his wits, hold in check his rising terror. Then slowly he reached in his shirt pocket and brought out the silver brooch with the shiny purple stone that was the colour of heather in bloom. He let the treasure lie in the palm of his hand where the sunlight struck it from the west.

"You'll kill me to get my lambs," Jimmy said quietly, turning the brooch to catch more sunlight so that it gleamed brighter than before.

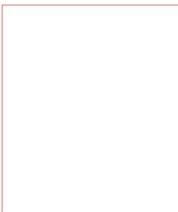
"What's that in your fist?" the stranger asked.

"Silver and precious stone," Jimmy replied. "Worth more than all the band of sheep." He looked into the stranger's eyes and saw them glitter.

"If you steal this," Jimmy went on, "a curse will be on you. This can't be killed for or stolen. But it can be bargained for."

Now that he was making a story, he ceased to be afraid. It was like listening to his mother talk when the sea was rough and the fishing boats were in danger. Always his mother had told the children stories until the sea seemed a friend, and faith would come to them that their father would get home.

"I heard of a man who stole one of these jewels," Jimmy said, "killing a man to get it. Blindness struck him." And he turned the silver brooch until





the sun glinted on the glass, making a light that fell full in the stranger's eyes.

"But," Jimmy went on, "it can be bargained for, and no harm done. I'll bargain with you—this for you, if you leave my long-tailed lambs." And he moved closer so the wild eyes could look more closely at the stone.

"I can take it—and the lambs." The stranger spat on the ground.

"Aye." Jimmy nodded. "That is so. And you'll have to kill me, for I'll fight. It's for you to choose whether there's a curse on you or not."

The stranger didn't speak.

Jimmy's hand tightened on the brooch. "I'll never be the same without it," he said, more to himself than to the stranger. "It is giving something inside me away."

Then the evil-smelling man moved close and held out the hand with the bloody fingers. "I'll take it—and leave your sheep."

When the brooch fell from his hand to the hand of the stranger, tears began to run down Jimmy's cheeks and the strength left his legs. He fell down to the ground and lay as one dead. When he awoke, it was dark, and he was cold and hungry. He jumped up, thinking only of the sheep, and ran to build fires and walk the bed ground. The dogs greeted him and licked his hands.

Two days later when Angus Duncan came riding up from the flat country, he looked sharply at Jimmy and said. "Have you forgotten to eat, boy? What's happened to you?" And the big man got off his horse and put his hand gently on Jimmy's shoulder.

Jimmy talked slowly and carefully, telling his story of the stranger. Afterward he waited for Angus Duncan to laugh at him or tease him. But Angus neither laughed nor spoke, he walked over to the dwindling water hole near the snowdrift that now was almost gone and looked at the ground. "There is no track of a man here," he said, "but, of course, the sheep have been in to drink and trampled the earth."

He came back to Jimmy and said, "I brought you some sweets. Strange, how a man hungers for them on the mountain." And he took a sack of candy and put it in Jimmy's hand.

Once Jimmy would have stood there and stuffed the candy in his mouth and eaten until the sack was empty. But now he only held the sack and said casually, "I may have some tonight after my supper. Thank you."

"In the silence," Angus Duncan said, "a man learns to be strong. And the silence is not only on the mountain, Jimmy. Somewhere—before he dies—every man must meet it and struggle with it on his own terms. In the silence we must face only ourselves." Again Angus Duncan's hand touched the boy's shoulder. "I see now you have done that."

Jimmy's hand moved to his empty shirt pocket. *I could have lost the*

*brooch, there at the edge of the mountain when I was looking to the prairie and the wagons of other herders, he thought. Still—*

“Well,” he said, “you’ll want to take a look at the sheep over there. I’ve lost only two lambs—one to the wild horses and another to the eagles.”

He walked with Angus Duncan toward the sheep. The light of later afternoon had given new shapes to everything, making even the grass look thicker and stronger. The silence was still there. But Jimmy smiled to himself, letting it move beside him as an old and familiar friend. ■

## Activities

1. Draw a map of Jimmy’s camp. Show as many details as you can, using information from the author’s description of the setting.
2. Work with a partner to review what Jimmy learned about tending sheep. Write a list of instructions that he can give to the person who will watch the sheep next year.
3. Jimmy is a dynamic character who undergoes a number of changes during this story. Create a flowchart to show how his experiences develop his character.
4. Angus tells Jimmy, “In the silence we must face only ourselves.” Discuss this statement with a partner, explaining to each other what you think he means by this. Rewrite the line as a statement that could be given as advice to any young person starting out in life. Present your advice to the class. Discuss how your advice resembles or differs from the advice of other students. What could account for these differing interpretations?

# The Time of the Wolves

MARCIA MULLER



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- review elements of a short story
- consider author's technique
- write the story from a different perspective
- role-play a conversation

"It was in the time of the wolves that my grandmother came to Kansas." The old woman sat primly on the sofa in her apartment in the senior citizens' complex. Although her faded blue eyes were focussed on the window, the historian who sat opposite her sensed Mrs. Clark was not seeing the shopping malls and used-car lots that had spilled over into what once was open prairie. As she'd begun speaking, her gaze had turned inward—and into the past.

The historian—who was compiling an oral account of the Kansas pioneers—adjusted the volume button on her tape recorder and looked expectantly at Mrs. Clark. But the descendant of those pioneers was in no hurry; she waited a moment before her story.

"The time of the wolves—that's the way I thought of it as a child, and I speak of it that way to this very day. It's fitting; those were perilous times, in

the 1870s. Vicious packs of wolves and coyotes roamed; fires would sweep the prairie without warning; there were disastrous floods; and, of course, blizzards. But my grandmother was a true pioneer woman: she knew no fear. One time in the winter of 1872 ..."

Alma Heusser stood in the doorway of the sod house, looking north over the prairie. It was gone four in the afternoon now, and storm clouds were building on the horizon. The chill in the air penetrated even her heavy buffalo-skin robe; a hush had fallen, as if all the creatures on the barren plain were holding their breath, waiting for the advent of the snow.

Alma's hand tightened on the rough doorframe. Fear coiled in her stomach. Every time John was forced to make the long trek into town she stood like this, awaiting his return. Every moment until his horse appeared in the distance she imagined that some terrible event had taken him from her. And on this night, with the blizzard threatening ...

The shadows deepened, purpled by the impending storm. Alma shivered and hugged herself beneath the enveloping robe. The land stretched before her: flat, treeless, its sameness mesmerizing. If she looked at it long enough, her eyes would begin to play tricks on her—tricks that held the power to drive her mad.

She'd heard of a woman who had been driven mad by the prairie: a timid, gentle woman who had travelled some miles east with her husband to gather wood. When they had finally stopped their wagon at a grove, the woman had gotten down and run to a tree—the first tree she had touched in three years. It was said they had had to pry her loose, because she refused to stop hugging it.

The sound of a horse's hooves came from the distance. Behind Alma, ten-year-old Margaret asked, "Is that him? Is it Papa?"

Alma strained to see through the rapidly gathering dusk. "No," she said, her voice flat with disappointment. "No, it's only Mr. Carstairs."

The Carstairs, William and Sarah, lived on a claim several miles east of there. It was not unusual for William to stop when passing on his way from town. But John had been in town today, too; why had they not ridden back together?

The coil of fear wound tighter as she went to greet him.

"No, I won't dismount," William Carstairs said in response to her invitation to come inside and warm himself. "Sarah doesn't know I am here, so I must be home swiftly. I've come to ask a favour."

"Certainly. What is it?"

"I'm off to the East in the morning. My mother is ill and hasn't much longer; she's asked for me. Sarah is anxious about being alone. As you know, she's been homesick these past two years. Will you look after her?"

"Of course." Alma said the words with a readiness she did not feel. She did not like Sarah Carstairs. There was something mean-spirited about the young woman, a suspicious air in the way she dealt with others that bordered on the hostile. But looking after neighbours was an inviolate obligation here on the prairie, essential to survival.

"Of course we'll look after her," she said more warmly, afraid her reluctance had somehow sounded in her voice. "You need not worry."

After William Carstairs had ridden off, Alma remained in the doorway of the sod house until the horizon had receded into darkness. She would wait for John as long as was necessary, hoping that her hunger for the sight of him had the power to bring him home again.

"Neighbours were the greatest treasure my grandparents had," Mrs. Clark explained. "The pioneer people were a warmhearted lot, open and giving, closer than many of today's families. And the women in particular were a great source of strength and comfort to one another. My grandmother's friendship with Sarah Carstairs, for example ..."

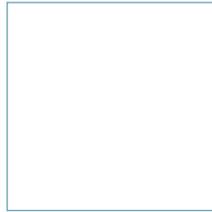
"I suppose I must pay a visit to Sarah," Alma said. It was two days later. The snowstorm had never arrived, but even though it had retreated into Nebraska, another seemed to be on the way. If she didn't go to the Carstairs' claim today, she might not be able to look in on Sarah for some time to come.

John grunted noncommittally and went on trimming the wick of the oil lamp. Alma knew he didn't care for Sarah either, but he was a taciturn man, slow to voice criticism. And he also understood the necessity of standing by one's neighbours.

"I promised William. He was so worried about her." Alma waited, hoping her husband would forbid her to go because of the impending storm. No such dictum was forthcoming, however: John Heusser was not one to distrust his wife's judgment; he would abide by whatever she decided.

So, driven by a promise she wished she had not been obligated to make, Alma set off on horseback within the hour.

The Carstairs' claim was a poor one, although to Alma's way of thinking it need not be. In the hands of John Heusser it would have been bountiful with wheat and corn, but William Carstairs was an unskilled farmer. His crops had parched even during the past two summers of plentiful rain; his animals fell ill and died of unidentifiable ailments; the house and outbuildings grew ever more ramshackle through his neglect. If Alma were a fanciful woman—and she preferred to believe she was not—she would have said there was a curse on the land. Its appearance on this grim February day did little to dispel the illusion.



In the foreground stood the house, its roof beam sagging, its chimney askew. The barn and other outbuildings behind it looked no better. The horse in the enclosure was bony and spavined; the few chickens seemed too dispirited to scratch at the hard-packed earth. Alma tied her sorrel to the fence and walked toward the house, her reluctance to be there asserting itself until it was nearly a foreboding. There was no sign of welcome from within, none of the flurry of excitement that the arrival of a visitor on the isolated homesteads always occasioned. She called out, knocked at the door. And waited.

After a moment the door opened slowly and Sarah Carstairs looked out. Her dark hair hung loose about her shoulders; she wore a muslin dress dyed the rich brown of walnut bark. Her eyes were deeply circled—haunted, Alma thought.

Quickly she shook off the notion and smiled. "We've heard that Mr. Carstairs had to journey East," she said. "I thought you might enjoy some company."

The younger woman nodded. Then she opened the door wider and motioned Alma inside.

The room was much like Alma's main room at home, with narrow, tall windows, a rough board floor, and an iron stove for both cooking and heating. The curtains at the windows were plain burlap grain sacks, not at all like Alma's neatly stitched muslin ones, with their appliqués of flowers. The furnishings—a pair of rockers, pine cabinet, sideboard, and table—had been new when the Carstairs arrived from the East two years before, but their surfaces were coated with the grime that accumulated from cooking.

Sarah shut the door and turned to face Alma, still not speaking. To cover her confusion Alma thrust out the corn bread she had brought. The younger woman took it, nodding thanks. After a slight hesitation she set it on the table and motioned somewhat gracelessly at one of the rockers. "Please," she said.

Alma undid the fastenings of her heavy cloak and sat down, puzzled by the strange reception. Sarah went to the stove and added a log, in spite of the room already being quite warm.

"He sent you to spy on me, didn't he?"

The words caught Alma by complete surprise. She stared at Sarah's narrow back, unable to make a reply.

Sarah turned, her sharp features pinched by what might have been anger. "That is why you're here, is it not?" she asked.

"Mr. Carstairs did ask us to look out for you in his absence, yes."

"How like him," Sarah said bitterly.

Alma could think of nothing to say to that.

Sarah offered her coffee. As she prepared it, Alma studied the young



woman. In spite of the heat in the room and her proximity to the stove, she rubbed her hands together; her shawl slipped off her thin shoulders, and she quickly pulled it back. When the coffee was ready—a bitter, nearly unpalatable brew—she sat cradling the cup in her hands, as if to draw even more warmth from it.

After her earlier strangeness Sarah seemed determined to talk about the commonplace: the storm that was surely due, the difficulty of obtaining proper cloth, her hope that William would not forget the bolt of calico she had requested he bring. She asked Alma about making soap: Had she ever done so? Would she allow her to help the next time so she might learn? As they spoke, she began to wipe beads of moisture from her brow. The room remained very warm; Alma removed her cloak and draped it over the back of the rocker.

Outside, the wind was rising, and the light that came through the narrow windows was tinged with grey. Alma became impatient to be off for home before the storm arrived, but she also became concerned with leaving Sarah alone. The young woman's conversation was rapidly growing erratic and rambling; she broke off in the middle of sentences to laugh irrelevantly. Her brow continued moist, and she threw off her shawl, fanning herself. Alma, who like all frontier women had had considerable experience at doctoring the sick, realized Sarah had been taken by a fever.

Her first thought was to take Sarah to her own home, where she might look after her properly, but one glance out the window discouraged her. The storm was nearing quickly now; the wind gusted, tearing at the dried cornstalks in William Carstairs's uncleared fields, and the sky was streaked with black and purple. A ride of several miles in such weather would be the death of Sarah; do Alma no good, either. She was here for the duration, with only a sick woman to help her make the place secure.

She glanced at Sarah, but the other woman seemed unaware of what was going on outside. Alma said, "You're feeling poorly, aren't you?"

Sarah shook her head vehemently. A strand of dark brown hair fell across her forehead and clung there damply. Alma sensed she was not a woman who would give in easily to illness, would fight any suggestion that she take to her bed until she was near collapse. She thought over the remedies she had administered to others in such a condition, wondered whether Sarah's supplies included the necessary sassafras tea or quinine.

Sarah was rambling again—about the prairie, its loneliness and desolation. "... listen to that wind! It's with us every moment. I hate the wind and the cold, I hate the nights when the wolves prowl ..."

A stealthy touch of cold moved along Alma's spine. She, too, feared the wolves and coyotes. John told her it came from having Germanic blood. Their older relatives had often spoken in hushed tones of the wolf packs in



the Black Forest. Many of their native fairy tales and legends concerned the cruel cunning of the animals, but John was always quick to point out that these were only stories. "Wolves will not attack a human unless they sense sickness or weakness," he often asserted. "You need only take caution."

But all of the settlers, John included, took great precautions against the roaming wolf packs; no one went out onto the prairie unarmed. And the stories of merciless and unprovoked attacks could not all be unfounded ...

"I hear the wolves at night," Sarah said. "They scratch on the door and the sod. They're hungry. Oh, yes, they're hungry ..."

Alma suddenly got to her feet, unable to sit for the tautness in her limbs. She felt Sarah's eyes on her as she went to the sideboard and lit the oil lamp. When she turned to Sarah again, the young woman had tilted her head against the high back of the rocker and was viewing her through slitted lids. There was a glitter in the dark crescents that remained visible that struck Alma as somehow malicious.

"Are you afraid of the wolves, Alma?" she asked slyly.

"Anyone with good sense is."

"And you in particular?"

"Of course I'd be afraid if I met one face-to-face!"

"Only if you were face-to-face with it? Then you won't be afraid staying here with me when they scratch at the door. I tell you, I hear them every night. Their claws go *snick, snick* on the boards ..."

The words were baiting. Alma felt her dislike for Sarah Carstairs gather strength. She said calmly, "Then you've noticed the storm is fast approaching."

Sarah extended a limp arm toward the window. "Look at the snow."

Alma glanced over there, saw the first flakes drifting past the wavery pane of glass. The sense of foreboding she'd felt upon her arrival intensified, sending little prickles over the surface of her skin.

Firmly she reined in her fear and met Sarah's eyes with a steady gaze. "You're right; I must stay here. I'll be as little trouble to you as possible."

"Why should you be trouble? I'll be glad of the company." Her tone mocked the meaning of the words. "We can talk. It's a long time since I've had anyone to talk to. We'll talk of my William."

Alma glanced at the window again, anxious to put her horse into the barn, out of the snow. She thought of the revolver she carried in her saddlebag as defence against the dangers of the prairie; she would feel safer if she brought it inside with her.

"We'll talk of my William," Sarah repeated. "You'd like that, wouldn't you, Alma?"

"Of course. But first I must tend to my horse."

"Yes, of course you'd like talking of William. You like talking *to* him. All





those times when he stops at your place on his way home to me. On his way home, when your John isn't there. Oh, yes, Alma, I know about those visits." Sarah's eyes were wide now, the malicious light shining brightly.

Alma caught her breath. She opened her mouth to contradict the words, then shut it. It was the fever talking, she told herself, exaggerating the fears and delusions that life on the frontier could sometimes foster. There was no sense trying to reason with Sarah. What mattered now was to put the horse up and fetch her weapon. She said briskly, "We'll discuss this when I've returned," donned her cloak, and stepped out into the storm.

The snow was sheeting along on a northwesterly gale. The flakes were small and hard; they stung her face like hailstones. The wind made it difficult to walk; she leaned into it, moving slowly toward the hazy outline of her sorrel. He stood by the rail, his feet moving skittishly. Alma grasped his halter, clung to it a moment before she began leading him toward the ramshackle barn. The chickens had long ago fled to their coop. Sarah's bony bay was nowhere in sight.

The doors to the barn stood open, the interior in darkness. Alma led the sorrel inside and waited until her eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom. When they had, she spied a lantern hanging next to the door, matches and flint nearby. She fumbled with them, got the lantern lit, and looked around.

Sarah's bay stood in one of the stalls, apparently accustomed to looking out for itself. The stall was dirty, and the entire barn held an air of neglect. She set the lantern down, unsaddled the sorrel, and fed and watered both horses. As she turned to leave, she saw the dull gleam of an axe lying on top of a pile of wood. Without considering why she was doing so, she picked it up and carried it, along with her gun, outside. The barn doors were warped and difficult to secure, but with some effort she managed.

Back in the house, she found Sarah's rocker empty. She set down the axe and the gun, calling out in alarm. A moan came from beyond the rough burlap that curtained off the next room. Alma went over and pushed aside the cloth.

Sarah lay on a brass bed, her hair fanned out on the pillows. She had crawled under the tumbled quilts and blankets. Alma approached and put a hand to her forehead; it was hot, but Sarah was shivering.

Sarah moaned again. Her eyes opened and focussed unsteadily on Alma. "Cold," she said. "So cold ..."

"You've taken a fever." Alma spoke briskly, a manner she'd found effective with sick people. "Did you remove your shoes before getting into bed?"

Sarah nodded.

"Good. It's best you keep your clothes on, though; this storm is going to be a bad one; you'll need them for warmth."

Sarah rolled onto her side and drew herself into a ball, shivering violently. She mumbled something, but her words were muffled.

Alma leaned closer. "What did you say?"

"The wolves ... they'll come tonight, scratching—"

"No wolves are going to come here in this storm. Anyway, I've a gun and the axe from your woodpile. No harm will come to us. Try to rest now, perhaps sleep. When you wake, I'll bring some tea that will help break the fever."

Alma went toward the door, then turned to look back at the sick woman. Sarah was still curled on her side, but she had moved her head and was watching her. Her eyes were slitted once more, and the light from the lamp in the next room gleamed off them—hard and cold as the icicles that must be forming on the eaves.

Alma was seized by an unreasoning chill. She moved through the door, out into the lamplight, toward the stove's warmth. As she busied herself with finding things in the cabinet, she felt a violent tug of home.

Ridiculous to fret, she told herself. John and Margaret would be fine. They would worry about her, of course, but would know she had arrived here well in advance of the storm. And they would also credit her with the good sense not to start back home on such a night.

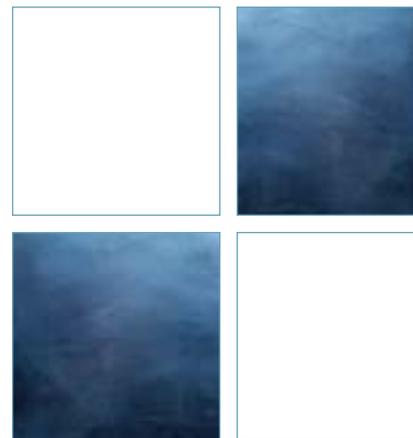
She rummaged through the shelves and drawers, found the herbs and tea and some roots that would make a healing brew. Outside, there was a momentary quieting of the wind; in the bedroom Sarah also lay quiet. Alma put on the kettle and sat down to wait for it to boil.

It was then that she heard the first wolf howls, not far away on the prairie.

"The bravery of the pioneer women has never been equalled," Mrs. Clark told the historian. "And there was a solidarity, a sisterhood among them that you don't see any more. That sisterhood was what sustained my grandmother and Sarah Carstairs as they battled the wolves ..."

For hours the wolves howled in the distance. Sarah awoke, throwing off the covers, complaining of the heat. Alma dosed her repeatedly with the herbal brew and waited for the fever to break. Sarah tossed about on the bed, raving about wolves and the wind and William. She seemed to have some fevered notion that her husband had deserted her, and nothing Alma would say would calm her. Finally she wore herself out and slipped into a troubled sleep.

Alma prepared herself some tea and pulled one of the rockers close to the stove. She was bone-tired, and the cold was bitter now, invading the lit-



tle house through every crack and pore in the sod. Briefly she thought she should bring Sarah into the main room, prepare a pallet on the floor nearer the heat source, but she decided it would do the woman more harm than good to be moved. As she sat warming herself and sipping the tea, she gradually, became aware of an eerie hush and realized the wind had ceased.

Quickly she set down her cup and went to the window. The snow stopped, too. Like its sister storm of two days before, this one had retreated north, leaving behind a barren white landscape. The moon had appeared near to full, and its stark light glistened off the snow.

And against the snow moved the black silhouettes of the wolves.

They came from the north, rangy and shaggy, more like ragged shadows than flesh-and-blood creatures. Their howling was silenced now, and their gait held purpose. Alma counted five of them, all of a good size yet bony. Hungry.

She stepped back from the window and leaned against the wall beside it. Her breathing was shallow, and she felt strangely light-headed. For a moment she stood, one hand pressed to her midriff, bringing her senses under control. Then she moved across the room, to where William Carstairs's Winchester rifle hung on the wall. When she had it in her hands, she stood looking irresolutely at it.

Of course Alma knew how to fire a rifle; all frontier women did. But she was only a fair shot with it, a far better shot with her revolver. She could use the rifle to fire at the wolves at a distance, but the best she could hope for was to frighten them. Better to wait and see what transpired.

She set the rifle down and turned back to the window. The wolves were still some distance away. And what if they did come to the house, scratch at the door as Sarah had claimed? The house was well built; there was little harm the wolves could do it.

Alma went to the door to the bedroom. Sarah still slept, the covers pushed down from her shoulders. Alma went in and pulled them up again. Then she returned to the main room and the rocker.

The first scratchings came only minutes later. *Snick, snick* on the boards, just as Sarah had said.

Alma gripped the arms of the rocker with icy fingers. The revolver lay in her lap.

The scratching went on. Snuffling noises, too. In the bedroom Sarah cried out in protest. Alma got up and looked in on her. The sick woman was writhing on the bed. "They're out there! I know they are!"

Alma went to her. "Hush, they won't hurt us." She tried to rearrange Sarah's covers, but she only thrashed harder.

"They'll break the door, they'll find a way in, they'll—"



Alma pressed her hand over Sarah's mouth. "Stop it! You'll only do yourself harm."

Surprisingly Sarah calmed. Alma wiped sweat from her brow and waited. The young woman continued to lie quietly.

When Alma went back to the window, she saw that the wolves had retreated. They stood together, several yards away, as if discussing how to breach the house.

Within minutes they returned. Their scratchings became bolder now; their claws ripped and tore at the sod. Heavy bodies thudded against the door, making the boards tremble.

In the bedroom Sarah cried out. This time Alma ignored her.

The onslaught became more intense. Alma checked the load on William Carstairs's rifle, then looked at her pistol. Five rounds left. Five rounds, five wolves ...

The wolves were in a frenzy now—incited, perhaps, by the odour of sickness within the house. Alma remembered John's words: "They will not attack a human unless they sense sickness or weakness." There was plenty of both here.

One of the wolves leapt at the window. The thick glass creaked but did not shatter. There were more thumps at the door; its boards groaned.

Alma took her pistol in both hands, held it ready, moved toward the door.

In the bedroom Sarah cried out for William. Once again Alma ignored her.

The coil of fear that was so often in the pit of Alma's stomach wound taut. Strangely it gave her strength. She trained the revolver's muzzle on the door, ready should it give.

The attack came from a different quarter: the window shattered, glass smashing on the floor. A grey head appeared, tried to wriggle through the narrow casement. Alma smelled its foul odour, saw its fangs. She fired once ... twice.

The wolf dropped out of sight.

The assault on the door ceased. Cautiously Alma moved forward. When she looked out the window, she saw the wolf lying dead on the ground—and the others renewing their attack on the door.

Alma scrambled back as another shaggy grey head appeared in the window frame. She fired. The wolf dropped back, snarling.

It lunged once more. Her finger squeezed the trigger. The wolf fell.

One round left. Alma turned, meaning to fetch the rifle. But Sarah stood behind her.

The sick woman wavered on her feet. Her face was coated with sweat, her



hair tangled. In her hands she held the axe that Alma had brought from the woodpile.

In the instant before Sarah raised it above her head, Alma saw her eyes. They were made wild by something more than fever: The woman was totally mad.

Disbelief made Alma slow. It was only as the blade began its descent that she was able to move aside.

The blade came down, whacked into the boards where she had stood.

Her sudden motion nearly put her on the floor. She stumbled, fought to steady herself.

From behind her came a scrambling sound. She whirled, saw a wolf wriggling halfway through the window casement.

Sarah was struggling to lift the axe.

Alma pivoted and put her last bullet into the wolf's head.

Sarah had raised the axe. Alma dropped the revolver and rushed at her. She slammed into the young woman's shoulder, sent her spinning toward the stove. The axe crashed to the floor.

As she fell against the hot metal Sarah screamed—a sound more terrifying than the howls of the wolves.

"My grandmother was made of stronger cloth than Sarah Carstairs," Mrs. Clark said. "The wolf attack did irreparable damage to poor Sarah's mind. She was never the same again."

Alma was never sure what had driven the two remaining wolves off—whether it was the death of the others or the terrible keening of the sick and injured woman in the sod house. She was never clear on how she managed to do what needed to be done for Sarah, nor how she got through the remainder of that terrible night. But in the morning when John arrived—so afraid for her safety that he had left Margaret at home and braved the drifted snow alone—Sarah was bandaged and put to bed. The fever had broken, and they were able to transport her to their own home after securing the battered house against the elements.

If John sensed that something more terrible than a wolf attack had transpired during those dark hours, he never spoke of it. Certainly he knew Sarah was in grave trouble, though, because she never said a word throughout her entire convalescence, save to give her thanks when William returned—summoned by them from the East—and took her home. Within the month the Carstairs had deserted their claim and left Kansas, to return to their native state of Vermont. There, Alma hoped, the young woman would somehow find peace.

As for herself, fear still curled in the pit of her stomach as she waited for



John on those nights when he was away. But no longer was she shamed by the feeling. The fear, she knew now, was a friend—something that had stood her in good stead once, would be there should she again need it. And now, when she crossed the prairie, she did so with courage, for she and the lifesaving fear were one.

Her story done, Mrs. Clark smiled at the historian. “As I’ve said, my dear,” she concluded, “the women of the Kansas frontier were uncommon in their valour. They faced dangers we can barely imagine today. And they were fearless, one and all.”

Her eyes moved away to the window, and to the housing tracts and shoddy commercial enterprises beyond it. “I can’t help wondering how women like Alma Heusser would feel about the way the prairie looks today,” she added. “I should think they would hate it, and yet ...”

The historian had been about to shut off her tape recorder, but now she paused for a final comment. “And yet?” she prompted.

“And yet I think that somehow my grandmother would have understood that our world isn’t as bad as it appears on the surface. Alma Heusser has always struck me as a woman who knew that things aren’t always as they seem.” ■

## Activities

1. Work with one or two other students and pick one of the elements of this short story: foreshadowing, suspense, Sarah or Alma’s character, setting, conflict, or figurative language. Prepare a mini-lesson for the class on that element. Review the definition of the element, and strategies used by authors to develop it. Discuss how the element is used in the story. Prepare an overhead or handout to help you lead a discussion of the author’s technique.
2. The story is written from two sometimes contradictory perspectives: that of the granddaughter, and that of the narrator, who uses the third person to describe the action of the story. Reread the granddaughter’s comments, and list her assumptions about pioneer women. Compare this list with “reality” as it appears in the story. As either Sarah or Alma, write a note to the granddaughter, referring to the assumptions she has made about your life and your relationship with the other character. Explain what you were really like and how things really were.
3. Pretend you are one of the surviving wolves. Rewrite the story from your perspective. Include your attitude toward the settlers, your plan of attack, the experience of the attack, and what happened next.
4. Work with a partner and role-play a conversation between Sarah and her husband in which she tries to convince him to move to a bigger town or city. Use evidence from the story to justify her desire to move.

# The Fighting Days

WENDY LILL



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this play excerpt will help you:

- consider audience
- look at stereotypes
- write a business letter
- reflect on subtleties of language

*Place: office of the Rural Review, a farm newspaper published in Winnipeg*

*Time: 1912 or 1913*

*Characters: Francis Beynon, George McNair*

*Shortly after arriving in Winnipeg, Francis lands a job writing for the women's page of The Rural Review. Influenced by Nellie McClung, who is a friend of Francis' sister Lily, she has transformed the women's page into a forum for women's suffrage. Francis' editor, George McNair, views this transformation with wry amusement. One senses that he tolerates Francis' opinions because he is in love with her; he will later ask her to marry him.*

**McNAIR:** Let's see what you've got on your page this week.

*(He pulls the page out of the typewriter and begins to read aloud.)*

"We have too long been contented with the kind of motherhood that can turn its back on mere children toiling incredible hours in factories making bullets and ammunition and uniforms for some faraway war and yet calmly say, 'Thank God it's not my children.' What we need now is a new spirit of national motherhood." And someone who can write shorter sentences. National motherhood. National motherhood? You make it sound like the railway, Miss Beynon.

**FRANCIS:** (*Deflated*) I quite liked that expression.

**McNAIR:** Is it yours?

**FRANCIS:** Well ...

**McNAIR:** It sounds like something off of Mrs. McClung's bat. You seem to have an opinion about everything lately. National motherhood, intemperate husbands, the German war machine, the profession of parenthood, the Boy Scout movement, and suffrage ad nauseam. But I find myself wondering ... what happened to your columns on mothers and babies, gingersnaps and peonies? What about the little crocheted sweaters for the wee ones. Hmmm? What about those things? They're important, too.

**FRANCIS:** Do you think they are more important than freedom from cruel husbands and fathers, from hypocritical ministers, from war-mongering politicians?

**McNAIR:** Oh, don't bludgeon me with adjectives. Just say what you mean.

**FRANCIS:** I'm sorry.

**McNAIR:** Unfortunately, the things you mention will always be with us. Scotch broth and shortbread and a garden full of bluebells make them a bit more tolerable. My mother knew that. She would never have bothered herself with voting and chasing men out of bars.

**FRANCIS:** But was she happy?

**McNAIR:** Happy? I don't know. She seemed content. She smiled a lot.

**FRANCIS:** You mean she just put up with it.

**McNAIR:** Perhaps. But the point is, she had enough to do in the home. You'll be wise to keep that in mind.

**FRANCIS:** If you think that women belong in the home, why did you hire me?

**McNAIR:** I had no choice. What self-respecting man would want to write about “women’s things”? Unfortunately, you don’t seem interested in writing about them either.

**FRANCIS:** Mr. McNair, are you not finding my work satisfactory?

**McNAIR:** Did I say that?

**FRANCIS:** You imply that.

**McNAIR:** I do not. I think that the suffrage question is ... interesting, but you take it much too far. Mrs. McClung need only pen one of her silly little verses and it somehow finds its way into your editorials.

**FRANCIS:** Mrs. McClung is at the forefront of the suffrage cause.

**McNAIR:** She is a dilettante and a debutante. And a hypocrite. She’s an upper-class snob who wouldn’t have given my poor mother the time of day.

**FRANCIS:** That’s not true. Nellie McClung is fighting for the vote for women.

**McNAIR:** For women who don’t need the vote. For women who’ve got something better than the vote! Influence! And furthermore, the proper lineage!

**FRANCIS:** No!

**McNAIR:** No? Then tell me why your suffrage club list is full of names like Stewart, Titheradge, Ward, Galbraith, Gordon, and not ... Lewycky, Schapansky and Swartz?

**FRANCIS:** Well, maybe their husbands won’t let them come.

**McNAIR:** They’re not there because your suffrage club doesn’t want them there. Neither do they want them living next to them on Chestnut Street nor their children sitting beside theirs at school.

**FRANCIS:** Mr. McNair, I believe in democracy for ALL women. I do!

**McNAIR:** Then you’re in the minority. Isobel Graham has gone on record saying she’s afraid the entire western hemisphere is sinking under the weight of the immigrants.

**FRANCIS:** Isobel has ... a blind spot.

**McNAIR:** And Laura McLaughlin, another one of your leading lights, is

heading up the fight to eliminate any foreign language in the schoolyard.

**FRANCIS:** That's because Laura thinks it's important that newcomers learn English.

**McNAIR:** That's because she hates the very idea of them.

**FRANCIS:** I admit there are some members who don't feel comfortable with all the strangers in our midst, but that will change. It takes time to alter attitudes. It takes time to remove the walls of class and privilege and ethnic differences that ...

**McNAIR:** Oh, don't start that again! The fact is the suffragists are an exclusive club. And you'd do well to stay away from them.

**FRANCIS:** I find it curious how you suddenly spring to the defence of foreign women. Because in the year that I've known you, you have never shown interest in ANY women having the vote, whether their name was Gordon or Schapansky! I'm beginning to think that you just enjoy muddying the waters!

**McNAIR:** (*Winking*) I enjoy arguing with you. You argue like a man!

**FRANCIS:** Well, I am not.

**McNAIR:** And I'm glad you're not.

**FRANCIS:** (*Flustered*) I believe in the vote for women, all women, and I am going to keep fighting for it.

**McNAIR:** Now don't get so flustered. It's not that important, is it?

**FRANCIS:** Mr. McNair, let me try to explain something to you. When I was a child, on the farm, I was constantly asking questions. Does God ever change his mind? Why was he angry all the time? Why couldn't I talk to the Polish children on the next farm? Why didn't my father help them out like the other neighbours? But nobody wanted to answer my questions. There seemed to be a secret fraternity at work that I didn't understand. My father and the Methodist minister and later my teachers thrashed and sermonized and ridiculed me until my spirit shrank and I began to doubt my very worth.

**McNAIR:** It doesn't seem to have been a lasting affliction. You seem to have quite an unswerving confidence.

**FRANCIS:** Well, I don't. I still cower at the voice of authority. Even now, I tense up as you, my editor, come into the room. Do you understand what I'm talking about?

**McNAIR:** Yes, I think so, but I'm not sure what it has to do with suffrage.

**FRANCIS:** Oh, but it's all connected! When I came to the city, I met women fighting for the freedom to think and worship and question for themselves, women who challenge authority ... who look it right in the eye and say, prove you're worthy of respect! I felt like I'd been let out of prison. I felt like a great gleam of sunlight had broken through the fog. And I didn't feel alone any more!

**McNAIR:** You're a funny one. You remind me of those little birds I found trapped in the house when I was a child. My mother would make me catch them and let them go free outside. And whenever I caught them, I could feel their little hearts beating in my hand, and I wanted to tell them not to be afraid, that I wasn't going to hurt them. You're like one of those little birds. Miss Beynon, I understand you live alone since your sister married. Perhaps you might be needing someone to look in on you once in a while.

**FRANCIS:** I would like that very much.

**McNAIR:** Good, then. I will do that. It's time you associated with someone who still holds womanhood sacred.

**FRANCIS:** No! I don't need anyone to hold womanhood sacred. I hold womanhood sacred myself. I do!

**McNAIR:** Well, you hold it at quite a distance. It might help your cause if you applied some rouge to your cheeks occasionally. Good day, Miss Beynon, I'll let you get back to national motherhood. ■

## Activities

- McNair hired Francis to write articles to appeal to a particular audience. Describe this audience.
  - What traditional stereotypes was Francis' column meant to maintain and encourage? In your own words, explain how Francis uses her column to try to break the stereotypes.
- Work with a partner to write a pair of newspaper articles, one that would have appeared on the women's page before Francis took over the column, and another that she might have written. Pay attention to the content of both, and consider the audience for each.
- Francis is ready to move on to a new job at a bigger newspaper. Pretend you are McNair and write a reference letter for her. Emphasize her skills and abilities. Use correct business-letter format.
- You are a harassment specialist hired by the government to investigate allegations of harassment of employees by employers. Consider the way that McNair speaks to Francis. To what extent would this be considered harassment today? Prepare a report as if you had investigated this event. Suggest ways that McNair should alter his behaviour to be more sensitive to issues of gender equity in the work place.

# Myself

PARASKEVA CLARK



National Gallery of Canada.

## Focus Your Learning

Working with this visual will help you:

- analyse visual emphasis
- examine artistic techniques
- express a message in another medium

## Activities

- a) Where is the emphasis in this painting?
  - b) What factors contribute to the emphasis of particular features?
2. How has the artist used line, shadow, texture, and proportion in this painting?
- a) What is the main message of this painting?
  - b) Write a poem or develop a cartoon with the same message.

# In Service

MAXINE TYNES

*This poem is dedicated to the generations of Black women who sustained life and survival for their families by bending low in labour in generations of White kitchens.*



Saturday morning armies  
of Black women  
young  
and old  
and, young and old at the same time  
in the same face  
in the same care and time and work-worn hands  
you rise with the dawn  
leaving home and brown babies  
behind you, in the day's early light  
pulling coat and scarf close  
avoiding the mirror  
shrinking from the cold morning of  
bus ride  
to prestigious street corner.

you are not alone  
you are with your sisters in this  
Northend — to Southend  
Jane Finch — to Rosedale  
Montreal — to Outremont  
Harlem — to Scarsdale  
wearing head-rag  
carrying dust-mop, scrub-bucket  
in-service three days a week march in the dawn.

you possess a key, cherished girl (never woman)  
of this house  
you tap and scuffle and wipe feet at the back  
and enter the world of  
day's  
day's  
day's work in service  
taking your place in that army of  
round and strong and weary backs  
moving with grace and sure familiar stride  
from your kitchen  
your babies  
your own forgotten morning at home  
to this  
three days-a-week armies of Black women  
in service.

### Focus Your Learning

Reading this poem will help you:

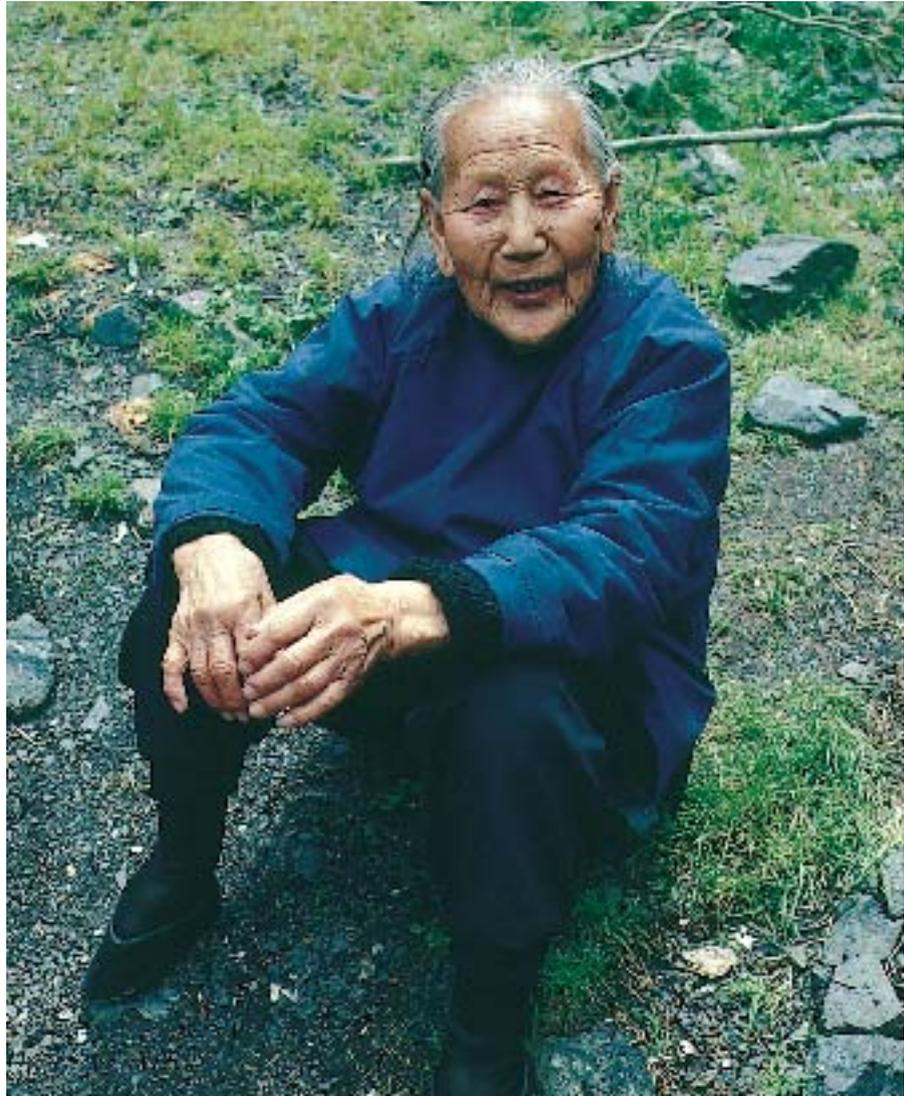
- study metaphor
- recognize and use repetition for effect
- write a monologue
- explore human experiences

## Activities

1. The author describes the housekeepers as an army. List the words and images that establish this metaphor throughout the poem. Why has the author chosen this image?
2. Look for words used repeatedly. What effect does this repetition have on the poem? Think of an image to describe school life. Use these images in a poem about school, using repetition to reinforce the image.
3. Write a short monologue describing your day as a housekeeper. Use details and images from the poem, but expand with your own ideas about what the feelings and experiences of these women might have been.
4. Write a letter to the author of the poem outlining your views on housekeeping. Is it demeaning work? Is it appreciated? Has the job changed over the years? To what extent is the author suggesting that the housekeepers in this poem were mistreated? Do you think they were mistreated?

# The Jade Peony

WAYSON CHOY



## Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- develop insight into character motivation
- understand and explain symbolism
- write instructions

When Grandmama died at 83 our whole household held its breath. She had promised us a sign of her leaving, final proof that her present life had ended well. My parents knew that without any clear sign, our own family fortunes could be altered, threatened. My stepmother looked endlessly into the small cluttered room the ancient lady had occupied. Nothing was touched; nothing changed. My father, thinking that a sign should appear in Grandmama's garden, looked at the frost-killed shoots and cringed: *no, that could not be it.*

My two older teenage brothers and my sister, Liang, age 14, were embarrassed by my parents' behaviour. What would all the white people in Vancouver think of us? We were Canadians now, *Chinese-Canadians*, a hyphenated reality that my parents could never accept. So it seemed, for different reasons, we all held our breath waiting for *something*.

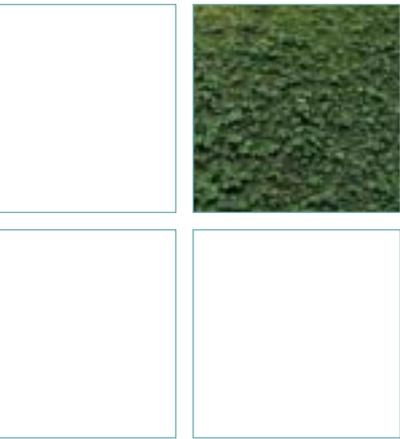
I was eight when she died. For days she had resisted going into the hospital ... *a cold, just a cold* ... and instead gave constant instruction to my stepmother and sister on the boiling of ginseng roots mixed with bitter extract. At night, between wracking coughs and deadly silences, Grandmama had her back and chest rubbed with heated camphor oil and sipped a bluish decoction of a herb called Peacock's Tail. When all these failed to abate her fever, she began to arrange the details of her will. This she did with my father, confessing finally: "I am too stubborn. The only cure for old age is to die."

My father wept to hear this. I stood beside her bed; she turned to me. Her round face looked darker, and the gentleness of her eyes, the thin, arching eyebrows, seemed weary. I brushed the few strands of grey, brittle hair from her face; she managed to smile at me. Being the youngest, I had spent nearly all my time with her and could not imagine that we would ever be parted. Yet when she spoke, and her voice hesitated, cracked, the sombre shadows of her room chilled me. Her wrinkled brow grew wet with fever, and her small body seemed even more diminutive.

"I—I am going to the hospital, Grandson." Her hand reached out for mine. "You know, Little Son, whatever happens I will never leave you." Her palm felt plush and warm, the slender, old fingers bony and firm, so magically strong was her grip that I could not imagine how she could ever part from me. Ever.

Her hands *were* magical. My most vivid memories are of her hands: long, elegant fingers, with impeccable nails, a skein of fine, barely-seen veins, and wrinkled skin like light pine. Those hands were quick when she taught me, at six, simple tricks of juggling, learned when she was a village girl in Southern Canton; a troupe of actors had stayed on her father's farm. One of them, "tall and pale as the whiteness of petals," fell in love with her, promising to return. In her last years his image came back like a third being in our two lives. He had been magician, acrobat, juggler, and some of the things he taught her she had absorbed and passed on to me through her stories and games. But above all, without realizing it then, her hands conveyed to me the quality of their love.

Most marvellous for me was the quick-witted skill her hands revealed in making wind chimes for our birthdays: wind chimes in the likeness of her lost friend's only present to her, made of bits of string and scraps, in the centre of which once hung a precious jade peony. This wondrous gift to her



broke apart years ago, in China, but Grandmama kept the jade pendant in a tiny red silk envelope, and kept it always in her pocket, until her death.

These were not ordinary, carelessly made chimes, such as those you now find in our Chinatown stores, whose rattling noises drive you mad. But making her special ones caused dissension in our family, and some shame. Each one that she made was created from a treasure trove of glass fragments and castaway costume jewellery, in the same way that her first wind chime had been made. The problem for the rest of the family was in the fact that Grandmama looked for these treasures wandering the back alleys of Keefer and Pender Streets, peering into our neighbours' garbage cans, chasing away hungry, nervous cats and shouting curses at them.

"All our friends are laughing at us!" Older Brother Jung said at last to my father, when Grandmama was away having tea at Mrs. Lim's.

"We are not poor," Oldest Brother Kiam declared, "yet she and Sek-Lung poke through those awful things as if—" he shoved me in frustration and I stumbled against my sister, "—they were beggars!"

"She will make Little Brother crazy!" Sister Liang said. Without warning, she punched me sharply in the back; I jumped. "You see, look how *nervous* he is!"

I lifted my foot slightly, enough to swing it back and kick Liang in the shin. She yelled and pulled back her fist to punch me again. Jung made a menacing move toward me.

"Stop this, all of you!" My father shook his head in exasperation. How could he dare tell the Grand Old One, his ageing mother, that what was somehow appropriate in a poor village in China, was an abomination here? How could he prevent me, his youngest, from accompanying her? If she went walking into those alley-ways alone she could well be attacked by hoodlums. "She is not a beggar looking for food. She is searching for— for ..."

My stepmother attempted to speak, then fell silent. She, too, seemed perplexed and somewhat ashamed. They all loved Grandmama, but she was *inconvenient*, unsettling.

As for our neighbours, most understood Grandmama to be harmlessly crazy, others that she did indeed make lovely toys but for what purpose? Why? they asked, and the stories she told me, of the juggler who smiled at her, flashed in my head.

Finally, by their cutting remarks, the family did exert enough pressure so that Grandmama and I no longer openly announced our expeditions. Instead, she took me with her on "shopping trips," ostensibly for clothes or groceries, while in fact we spent most of our time exploring stranger and more distant neighbourhoods, searching for splendid junk: jangling pieces of a vase, cranberry glass fragments embossed with leaves, discarded glass

beads from Woolworth necklaces .... We would sneak them all home in brown rice sacks, folded into small parcels, and put them under her bed. During the day when the family was away at school or work, we brought them out and washed every item in a large black pot of boiling lye and water, dried them quickly, carefully, and returned them, sparkling, under her bed.

Our greatest excitement occurred when a fire gutted the large Chinese Presbyterian Church, three blocks from our house. Over the still-smoking ruins the next day, Grandmama and I rushed precariously over the blackened beams to pick out the stained glass that glittered in the sunlight. Small figure bent over, wrapped against the autumn cold in a dark blue quilted coat, happily gathering each piece like gold, she became my spiritual playmate: "There's a good one! *There!*"

Hours later, soot-covered and smelling of smoke, we came home with a Safeway carton full of delicate fragments, still early enough to steal them all into the house and put the small box under her bed. "These are special pieces," she said, giving the box a last push, "because they come from a sacred place." She slowly got up and I saw, for the first time, her hand begin to shake. But then, in her joy, she embraced me. Both of our hearts were racing, as if we were two dreamers. I buried my face in her blue quilt, and for a moment, the whole world seemed silent.

"My juggler," she said, "he never came back to me from Honan ... perhaps the famine ...." Her voice began to quake. "But I shall have my sacred wind chime ... I shall have it again."

One evening, when the family was gathered in their usual places in the parlour, Grandmama gave me her secret nod: a slight wink of her eye and a flaring of her nostrils. There was *trouble* in the air. Supper had gone badly, school examinations were due, father had failed to meet an editorial deadline at the *Vancouver Chinese Times*. A huge sigh came from Sister Liang.

"But it is useless this Chinese they teach you!" she lamented, turning to Stepmother for support. Silence. Liang frowned, dejected, and went back to her Chinese book, bending the covers back.

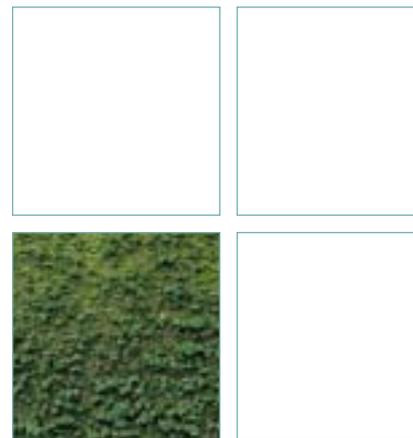
"Father," Oldest Brother Kiam began, waving his bamboo brush in the air, "you must realize that this Mandarin only confuses us. We are Cantonese speakers ..."

"And you do not complain about Latin, French, or German in your English school?" Father rattled his newspaper, signal that his patience was ending.

"But, Father, those languages are *scientific*," Kiam jabbed his brush in the air. "We are now in a scientific, logical world."

Father was silent. We could all hear Grandmama's rocker.

"What about Sek-Lung?" Older Brother Jung pointed angrily at me. "He



was sick last year, but this year he should have at least started Chinese school, instead of picking over garbage cans!"

"He starts next year," Father said, in a hard tone that immediately warned everyone to be silent. Liang slammed her book.

Grandmama went on rocking quietly in her chair. She complimented my mother on her knitting, made a remark about the "strong beauty" of Kiam's brushstrokes which, in spite of himself, immensely pleased him. All this babbling noise was her family torn and confused in a strange land: everything here was so very foreign and scientific.

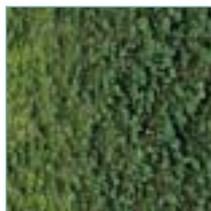
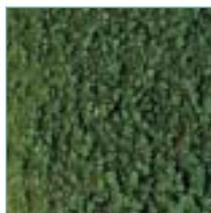
The truth was, I was sorry not to have started school the year before. In my innocence I had imagined going to school meant certain privileges worthy of all my brothers' and sister's complaints. The fact that my lung infection in my fifth and sixth years, mistakenly diagnosed as TB, earned me some reprieve, only made me long for school the more. Each member of the family took turns on Sunday, teaching me or annoying me. But it was the countless hours I spent with Grandmama that were my real education. Tapping me on my head she would say, "Come, Sek-Lung, we have *our* work," and we would walk up the stairs to her small crowded room. There, in the midst of her antique shawls, the old ancestral calligraphy, and multi-coloured embroidered hangings, beneath the mysterious shelves of sweet herbs and bitter potions, we would continue doing what we had started that morning: the elaborate wind chime for her death.

"I can't last forever," she declared, when she let me in on the secret of this one. "It will sing and dance and glitter," her long fingers stretched into the air, pantomiming the waving motion of her ghost chimes; "My spirit will hear its sounds and see its light and return to this house and say good-bye to you."

Deftly she reached into the Safeway carton she had placed on the chair beside me. She picked out a fish-shape amber piece, and with a long needle-like tool and a steel ruler, she scored it. Pressing the blade of a cleaver against the line, with the fingers of her other hand, she lifted up the glass until it cleanly snapped into the exact shape she required. Her hand began to tremble, the tips of her fingers to shiver, like rippling water.

"You see that, Little One?" She held her hand up. "That is my body fighting with Death. He is in this room now."

My eyes darted in panic, but Grandmama remained calm, undisturbed, and went on with her work. Then I remembered the glue and uncorked the jar for her. Soon the graceful ritual movements of her hand returned to her, and I became lost in the magic of her task: she dabbed a cabalistic mixture of glue on one end and skillfully dropped the braided end of a silk thread into it. This part always amazed me: the braiding would slowly, *very* slowly, *unknot*, fanning out like a prized fishtail. In a few seconds the clear, home-



made glue began to harden as I blew lightly over it, welding to itself each separate silk strand.

Each jam-sized pot of glue was precious; each large cork had been wrapped with a fragment of pink silk. I remember this part vividly, because each cork was treated to a special rite. First we went shopping in the best silk stores in Chinatown for the perfect square of silk she required. It had to be a deep pink, a shade of colour blushing toward red. And the tone had to match—as closely as possible—her precious jade carving, the small peony of white and light-red jade, her most lucky possession. In the centre of this semi-translucent carving, no more than an inch wide, was a pool of pink light, its veins swirling out into the petals of the flower.

“This colour is the colour of my spirit,” she said, holding it up to the window so I could see the delicate pastel against the broad strokes of sunlight. She dropped her voice, and I held my breath at the wonder of the colour. “This was given to me by the young actor who taught me how to juggle. He had four of them, and each one had a centre of this rare colour, the colour of Good Fortune.” The pendant seemed to pulse as she turned it: “Oh, Sek-Lung! He had white hair and white skin to *his toes!* *It’s true,* I saw him bathing.” She laughed and blushed, her eyes softened at the memory. The silk had to match the pink heart of her pendant: the colour was magical for her, to hold the unravelling strands of her memory ...

It was just six months before she died that we really began to work on her wind chime. Three thin bamboo sticks were steamed and bent into circles; thirty exact lengths of silk thread, the strongest kind, were cut and braided at both ends and glued to stained glass. Her hands worked on their own command, each hand racing with a life of its own: cutting, snapping, braiding, knotting .... Sometimes she breathed heavily and her small body, growing thinner, sagged against me. *Death,* I thought, *He is in this room,* and I would work harder alongside her. For months Grandmama and I did this every other evening, a half-dozen pieces each time. The shaking in her hand grew worse, but we said nothing. Finally, after discarding hundreds, she told me she had the necessary thirty pieces.

But this time, because it was a sacred chime, I would not be permitted to help her tie it up or have the joy of raising it. “Once tied,” she said, holding me against my disappointment, “not even I can raise it. Not a sound must it make until I have died.”

“What will happen?”

“Your father will then take the centre braided strand and raise it. He will hang it against my bedroom window so that my ghost may see it, and hear it, and return. I must say goodbye to this world properly or wander in this foreign devil’s land forever.”

“You can take the streetcar!” I blurted, suddenly shocked that she actually





meant to leave me. I thought I could hear the clear chromatic chimes, see the shimmering colours on the wall: I fell against her and cried, and there in my crying I knew that she would die. I can still remember the touch of her hand on my head, and the smell of her thick woollen sweater pressed against my face. "I will always be with you, Little Sek-Lung, but in a different way ... you'll see."

Months went by, and nothing happened. Then one late September evening, when I had just come home from Chinese School, Grandmama was preparing supper when she looked out our kitchen window and saw a cat—a long, lean, white cat—jump into our garbage pail and knock it over. She ran out to chase it away, shouting curses at it. She did not have her thick sweater on and when she came back into the house, a chill gripped her. She leaned against the door: "That was not a cat," she said, and the odd tone of her voice caused my father to look with alarm at her. "I cannot take back my curses. It is too late." She took hold of my father's arm: "It was all white and had pink eyes like sacred fire."

My father started at this, and they both looked pale. My brothers and sister, clearing the table, froze in their gestures.

"The fog has confused you," Stepmother said. "It was just a cat."

But Grandmama shook her head, for she knew it was a sign. "I will not live forever," she said. "I am prepared."

The next morning she was confined to her bed with a severe cold. Sitting by her, playing with some of my toys, I asked her about the cat.

"Why did father jump at the cat with the pink eyes? He didn't see it, you did."

"But he and your mother know what it means."

"What?"

"My friend, the juggler, the magician, was as pale as white jade, and he had pink eyes." I thought she would begin to tell me one of her stories, a tale of enchantment or of a wondrous adventure, but she only paused to swallow; her eyes glittered, lost in memory. She took my hand, gently opening and closing her fingers over it. "Sek-Lung," she sighed, "he has come back to me."

Then Grandmama sank back into her pillow and the embroidered flowers lifted to frame her wrinkled face. I saw her hand over my own, and my own began to tremble. I fell fitfully asleep by her side. When I woke up it was dark and her bed was empty. She had been taken to the hospital and I was not permitted to visit.

A few days after that she died of the complications of pneumonia. Immediately after her death my father came home and said nothing to us, but walked up the stairs to her room, pulled aside the drawn lace curtains of her window, and lifted the wind chimes to the sky.

I began to cry and quickly put my hand in my pocket for a handkerchief. Instead, caught between my fingers, was the small, round firmness of the jade peony. In my mind's eye I saw Grandmama smile and heard, softly, the pink centre beat like a beautiful, cramped heart. ■

## Activities

1. Assign a character in the family to each member in a small group. After each person has reviewed his or her character's role in the story, and is clear on his or her point of view, role-play a conversation the family might have had after the grandmother's death. (Don't forget that only the young child/narrator knows how his grandmother felt about the wind chimes.)
2. Pretend you are the father in the story. Write an obituary for your mother that will be published in the *Vancouver Chinese Times*. Make sure you use details from the story to summarize the main points of her life, her achievements, her dreams, and why she will be missed. You might want to look at some obituaries in your local newspaper for format.
3. What do the wind chimes symbolize for the grandmother, the parents, the young child? In an expository essay, explain how the wind chimes represent different things to different characters in the story. Develop an effective introduction and conclusion for your essay. Work on incorporating transition words and sentences to create unity.
4. Use details from the story to write the instructions for making a wind chime. If possible, try to make your own version of the wind chime.

# Equal Opportunity

JIM WONG-CHU

in early Canada  
when railways were highways  
each stop brought new opportunities  
there was a rule

the chinese could only ride  
the last two cars  
of the trains

that is

until a train derailed  
killing all those  
in front

(the chinese erected an altar and thanked buddha)

a new rule was made

the chinese must ride  
the front two cars  
of the trains

that is

until another accident  
claimed everyone  
in the back

(the chinese erected an altar and thanked buddha)

after much debate  
common sense prevailed

the chinese are now allowed  
to sit anywhere  
on any train

## Focus Your Learning

Reading this poem will help you:

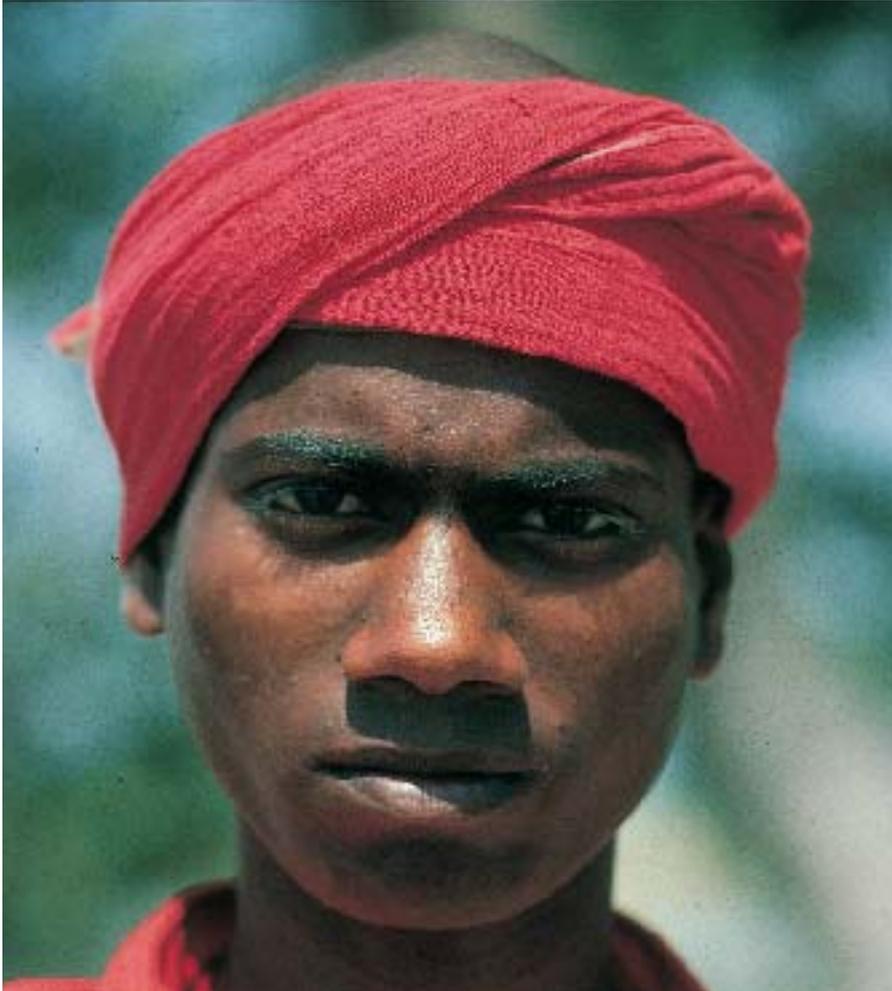
- understand irony
- develop an argument from a particular point of view
- write a newspaper article

## Activities

1. Work with a partner and review the term irony. Discuss the following questions and be prepared to present your responses to the class: What superstition develops in the poem? Why does it develop? Explain the irony of these lines: "after much debate/ common sense prevailed." How is the title ironic?
2. Develop a speech to present, as a Chinese-Canadian, explaining to the City Council your concerns about bus-seating policy. Consider what you find frustrating about the rules. What changes would you like to see? Present the speech to the class.
3. Using information from the poem, write a newspaper article explaining the new rule allowing Chinese people to sit anywhere on a train. Make sure you follow the conventions of a newspaper article: include who, what, where, when, why, and how; write a headline, and subheadings; use columns; include a picture; etc.

# Montreal 1962

SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN



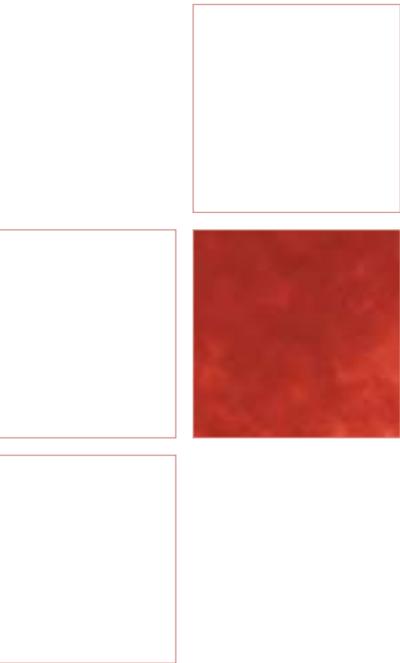
In the dark at night you came close and your voice was a whisper though there is no one here to wake. “They said I could have the job if I take off my turban and cut my hair short.” You did not have to say it. I saw it in your face as you took off your new coat and galoshes. I heard their voices in my head as I looked at the small white envelopes I have left in the drawer, each full of one more day’s precious dollars—the last of your savings and my dowry. Mentally, I converted dollars to rupees and thought how many people in India each envelope could feed for a month.

This was not how they described emigrating to Canada. I still remember them saying to you, “You’re a well-qualified man. We need professional people.” And they talked about freedom and opportunity for those lucky

## Focus Your Learning

Reading this narrative will help you:

- consider descriptive contrast
- create a visual representation of symbolism
- write in the first person
- explain the meaning of a passage
- write a found poem



enough to already speak English. No one said then, “You must be reborn white-skinned—and clean-shaven to show it—to survive.” Just a few months ago, they called us exotic new Canadians, new blood to build a new country.

Today I took one of my wedding saris to the neighbourhood dry cleaner and a woman with no eyebrows held it like a dishrag as she asked me, “Is it a bed sheet?”

“No,” I said.

“Curtains?”

“No.”

I took the silk back to our basement apartment, tied my hair in a tight bun, washed the heavy folds in the metal bathtub, and hung it, gold threads glinting, on a drip-dry hanger.

When I had finished, I spread a bed sheet on the floor of the bathroom, filled my arms with the turbans you’d worn last week, and knelt there surrounded by the empty soft hollows of scarlet, navy, earth brown, copper, saffron, mauve, and bright parrot green. As I waited for the bathtub to fill with warm soapy water I unravelled each turban, each precise spiral you had wound around your head, and soon the room was full of soft streams of muslin that had protected your long black hair.

I placed each turban in turn on the bubbly surface and watched them grow dark and heavy, sinking slowly, softly into the warmth. When there were no more left beside me, I leaned close and reached in, working each one in a rhythm bone-deep, as my mother and hers must have done before me, that their men might face the world proud. I drained the tub and new colours swelled—deep red, dark black mud, rust, orange, soft purple, and jade green.

I filled the enamel sink with clean water and starch and lifted them as someday I will lift children. When the milky bowl had fed them, my hands massaged them free of alien red-blue water. I placed them carefully in a basin and took them out into our grey two rooms to dry.

I placed a chair by the window and climbed on it to tie the four corners of each turban length to the heavy curtain rod. Each one in turn, I drew out three yards till it was folded completely in two. I grasped it firmly at its sides and swung my hands inward. The turban furrowed before me. I arced my hands outward and it became a canopy. Again inward, again outward, hands close, hands apart, as though I was back in Delhi on a flat roof under a hot sun or perhaps near a green field of wheat stretching far to the banks of the Beas.

As the water left the turbans, I began to see the room through muslin screens. The pallid walls, the radiator you try every day to turn up hotter for me, the small windows, unnaturally high. When the turbans were lighter, I

set the dining chairs with their half-moon backs in a row in the middle of the well-worn carpet and I draped the turbans over their tops the way Gidda dancers wear their chunnis pinned tight in the centre parting of their hair. Then I sat on the carpet before them, willing them: dance for me—dance for us. The chairs stood as stiff and wooden as ignorant Canadians, though I know maple is softer than chinar.

Soon the bands of cloth regained all their colour, filling the room with sheer lightness. Their splendour arched upwards, insisting upon notice, refusing the drabness, refusing obscurity, wielding the curtain rod like the strut of a defending champion.

From the windows over my head came the sounds of a Montreal afternoon, and the sure step of purposeful feet on the sidewalk. Somewhere on a street named in English where the workers speak joul I imagined your turban making its way in the crowds bringing you home to me.

Once again I climbed on a chair and I let your turbans loose. One by one, I held them to me, folding in their defiance, hushing their unruly indignation, gentling them into temporary submission. Finally, I faced them as they sat before me.

Then I chose my favourite, the red one you wear less and less, and I took it to the bedroom. I unfurled the gauzy scarlet on our bed and it seemed as though I'd poured a pool of the sainted blood of all the Sikh martyrs there. So I took a corner and tied it to the doorknob just as you do in the mornings instead of waking me to help you. I took the diagonal corner to the very far end of the room just as you do, and rolled the scarlet inward as best I could within the cramped four walls. I had to untie it from the doorknob again to roll the other half, as I used to every day for my father, then my brother, and now you. Soon the scarlet rope lay ready.

I placed it before the mirror and began to tie it as a Sardar would, one end clenched between my teeth to anchor it, arms raised to sweep it up to the forehead, down to the nape of the neck, around again, this time higher. I wound it swiftly, deftly, till it jutted haughtily forward, adding four inches to my stature. Only when I had pinned the free end to the peak did I let the end clenched between my teeth fall. I took the saliva-darkened cord, pulled it back where my hair bun rested low, and tucked it up over the turban, just as you do.

In the mirror I saw my father as he must have looked as a boy, my teenage brother as I remember him, you as you face Canada, myself as I need to be.

The face beneath the jaunty turban began to smile.

I raised my hands to my turban's roundness, eased it from my head and brought it before me, setting it down lightly before the mirror. It asked nothing now but that I be worthy of it.



And so, my love, I will not let you cut your strong rope of hair and go without a turban into this land of strangers. The knot my father tied between my chunni and your turban is still strong between us, and it shall not fail you now. My hands will tie a turban every day upon your head and work so we can keep it there. One day our children will say, "My father came to this country with very little but his turban and my mother learned to work because no one would hire him."

Then we will have taught Canadians what it takes to wear a turban. ■

## Activities

1. Use a visual organizer, such as a Venn diagram, to compare the narrator's description of the turbans with the description of the apartment. What is the author trying to achieve through the contrast?
2. What does the turban symbolize for the narrator? For her husband? Represent the symbolism visually, with images appropriate to each character.
3. As the narrator, write a letter to your mother explaining your feelings about living in Montreal. Explain how your lives have been affected by the move to Canada. Detail the frustrations you are experiencing and how you are coping with them.
4. The author writes "Then we will have taught Canadians what it takes to wear a turban." What does this mean? In your own words, describe the qualities of the narrator that demonstrate what this means.
5. Reread the story and jot down words and phrases that seem particularly striking or moving for you. Arrange these with your own ideas into a found poem that encapsulates the main themes of this narrative.

# Granny Glover's Dream

AL PITTMAN



Used by permission of David Blackwood

A long thin line  
thinner and thinner as it goes  
becomes a dot  
disappears where there is nothing  
these are the villagers  
they are leaving their village  
huddled into the wind  
they are going away  
out where there is nothing  
they have gone away to nothing  
the long thin line dissolves itself  
into the emptiness of snow  
at the end of the line  
turned to the wind  
she stands looking back

*poem continues on page 232* ►

if she had been farther up the line  
she could have been spared this instant  
but where she is  
at the end of it  
  
she is forced to confront  
face to face  
the final moment of their going  
in a second  
when this scene unfreezes itself  
she will turn  
become again the last of the line  
will turn and walk away  
will become nothing in the windy distance  
  
in this instant however  
she is frozen where she is  
solidified against the wind  
turned back toward the house  
  
on the window a flower pot  
and in it a flower bloomed open  
to the day's bright light  
outside everything is frozen still  
everything except the wind  
and the wind's white howling

# Looking Back

ENOS D. WATTS

Even when he knew  
they had all decided to leave the island  
the old man  
sat, with his face to the sea,  
and was not heard to make a sound.  
For days now  
he had been silent auditor  
to the sounds people made  
in preparation for moving away.  
He heard many sounds  
but the one that grieved him most  
was the ring of the hammer  
boarding up the church;  
and with each irrevokable stroke  
one could see his hands  
tighten into a claw,  
but the agony that lined his face  
spoke poignantly  
of something that pained him more  
than the mere ripping of nails  
into rotted pine.

On the final day  
in the yard behind the church  
he moved like an outcast  
among the half-sunken, tilting stones  
until his sensitive fingers read  
the time-shallowed symbols  
shrieking out at him  
their cruel, eloquent truth:  
he was certain now  
that the gulf between them  
would always be widest  
at his rock.  
And as the boat took him away  
from his home  
he, for the first time, was glad  
that he was blind  
knowing there'd be no purpose served  
in looking back.

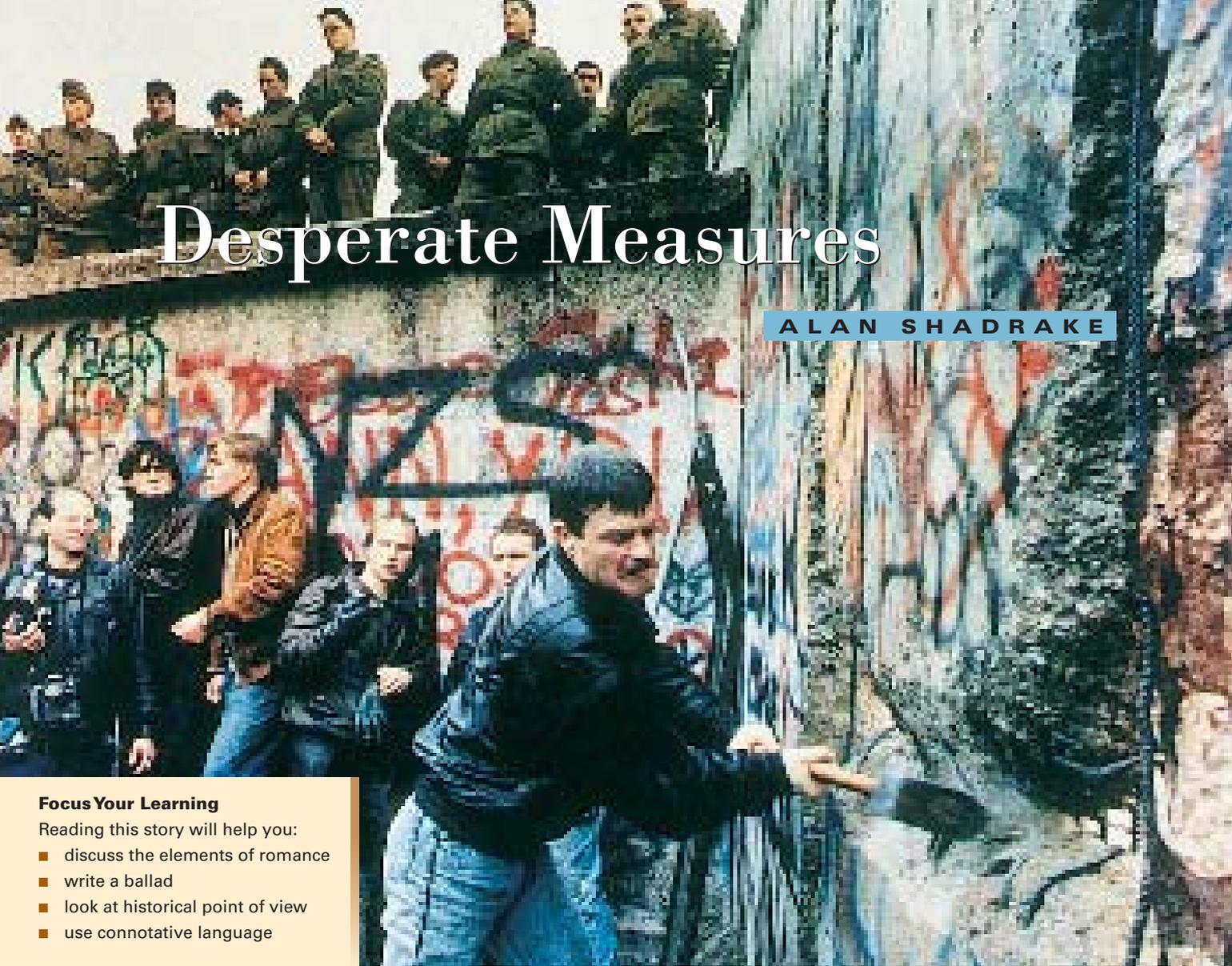
### Focus Your Learning

Reading these poems and viewing this visual will help you:

- Use a visual organizer
- Develop and explain your opinion
- Compare a visual and a written way of telling the same story

## Activities

1. In Newfoundland, many people have moved from small outports to larger centres, leaving some outport communities almost ghost towns. Use a *visual* organizer to compare and contrast the way that the visual artist, David Blackwood, and poet, Al Pittman, see this change.
2. **a)** What specific items do the woman in *Granny Glover's Dream* and the man in *Looking Back* find difficult to leave? In a small group, discuss what these items represent. To what sense do they appeal?  
**b)** Draw one item you would be sorry to leave behind in a similar situation. In a paragraph or short poem, explain what this item means to you.



# Desperate Measures

ALAN SHADRAKE

## Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- discuss the elements of romance
- write a ballad
- look at historical point of view
- use connotative language

The desperation which love can drive a person to knows no bounds, and the Berlin Wall acted on many ordinary people in the same way as the war had. They found they were capable of actions which before they could never have brought themselves to think about, let alone commit. Deep inside them, the Wall became more than just a man-made barrier: it was an object of defiance, and therefore they had to defy it. It had to be overcome, and produced in these people an outlet for aspects of their characters which they had never before accepted as existing.

Karin Kabofski was twenty-three, and the

war was to her no more than a childhood memory when the Berlin Wall took shape that August in 1961. To her it was no impersonal barricade but one which dramatically and instantly changed her way of life. For the Wall cut her off from the man whom she had known for five years, the man she loved and one day hoped to marry. His home had been within walking distance, just a few miles away, yet now she was in the East, he in the West, no further in distance but in practice now so very far.

Karin and twenty-eight-year-old Gunter Lutz found themselves suddenly separated, their

happiness and zest for life wrenched from them. They lived with the shadow of the Wall for as long as they were able, but they both knew that someday, somehow, they must at all costs attempt to rid themselves of it for good.

Karin, determined, desperate, and in love, had never given up hope, and when she finally decided how she would gain her freedom she knew it would mean perhaps jeopardizing her life if it was to succeed.

Karin gained her inspiration from a newspaper article. The article itself had not the slightest thing to do with an escape; it was because such thoughts were always in her mind that she was quick to realize the possibilities it offered.

The article told of the seagoing lives of East German merchant seamen, and mentioned that in some circumstances their wives were allowed to sail with them across the world. These were not voyages of a few days' duration which brought them quickly home, but long sea voyages which took them to the ports of many countries throughout the world, some of which had diplomatic relations with the East German Government but, most important, some which she knew would only have diplomatic relations with the West German Government and not recognize the Republic.

Those few words in the article fanned the flames of her desire for freedom, until now suppressed. She thought that perhaps as the wife of a seaman she would, on a long voyage, have the chance to take refuge in a West German embassy and so be free of the country she had come to despise. She knew that only she had the power to make what seemed at first such an unlikely plan come true. And so firmly was her mind made up, so certain was she that this was more than just an imaginatively fanciful thought, that she began to take the first steps towards its inception. She gave up her work, packed a few belongings, and

moved to Rostock on the Baltic coast, where she obtained an office job and started her strange quest for a man she could eventually make her husband despite her love for Gunter.

She became friendly with a seaman called Manfred Heyde who was twenty-eight. They drank together, spent pleasant evenings in each other's company, and Manfred talked for many hours about the different places throughout the world which he had visited. He talked of the other members of the crew and how they had taken their wives with them across the oceans. Knowing that this was the one way to freedom for her, Karin encouraged the relationship, and within a few months Manfred asked her to be his wife. She accepted. It was to be a marriage not of love, on Karin's part, but of necessity. Thinking of Gunter back in West Germany, she went through with the wedding ceremony, and looked forward to the only wedding present she had really wanted—a berth to freedom on the next voyage Manfred made.

Manfred made special application to his skipper to take his new wife on the next voyage, and on May 25th 1965, nearly four years after the erection of the Wall, Karin began her sea journey from a Baltic port.

She thought that the pretence would soon be over, for she understood that the ship, the *Leipzig*, was to dock at Hamburg before continuing its voyage. Once at the West German port she would immediately seek asylum. But the ship did not call at Hamburg, the pretence had to be kept up, and her false gaiety had to be used as a cover for her real feelings. The first port of call was London, but neither the crew, nor passengers like Karin were allowed to leave the ship, and her first opportunity to make a break for freedom had yet to come.

Nearly three weeks later, and a month after she had set out, they arrived in Havana, Cuba. It would for many have been a journey to

remember, but Karin was in no frame of mind to enjoy the sea and the sun, for again there was no possible hope of escape. Castro's government would certainly not have been sympathetic. The *Leipzig* sailed on with Karin. Four more days and the vessel docked at the Mexican port of Veracruz. It was to stay for two weeks, and this would be her first and perhaps her last chance of escape.

At the first opportunity she left the ship unobserved and tried to find the West German consulate. Speaking no Spanish, but with a dictionary and the help of a local taxi driver, she presented herself and her unusual and unlikely story. It was greeted with astonishment, so many miles was this determined East Berliner from her home. But arrangements were made to inform the ship's captain and her husband Manfred.

Manfred was thrown into a state of shock, and the captain did what he could to make Karin return to the ship. Her husband tried also, almost apologetically, feeling that it was he who had made her come to the decision.

But it was, of course, to no avail, although Karin, who had never loved Manfred, now felt sorry for the man on whom she had played a marital confidence trick. She could not tell him the truth, and said only

that she could not return to a life in East Germany, that it was the system, and not himself, which she could bear no longer.

It was twelve months before Karin could sort out the marital tangle in which, with open eyes, she had involved herself. The divorce was further complicated by the fact that the mar-

riage ceremony had been performed in East Germany, but when it was finally completed Karin Kabofski was at last free to marry the man she had really loved for many years. And it is in South America, where she was given her freedom, that she has settled down to a life with Gunter.

Karin's cold-blooded betrayal of an innocent man for the sake of another was perhaps a unique escape method. But for her it was a way, albeit dramatic, that she could rid herself forever of the shadow the Wall had cast on her life. She was free, and for her freedom—as it did for many thousands of others like her—meant a new meaning to life itself. Karin had devised and successfully completed a plan which, if circumstances had been different, she would never have thought she had in her nature to contemplate.

The end was freedom; the means, to Karin, were justified.

The happiness and gaiety of a wedding party, with its laughter and smiling faces, was to be the meeting place for one young couple who separately were enjoying the festivities and the pleasure of seeing the newly-weds at the outset of their life together. The wedding party was in East Berlin. Margit Tharau was a friend of the bride and the Austrian, Hans-Peter Meixner had joined the wedding celebration on behalf of a friend of the bridegroom who could not go himself.

Margit worked as a secretary in a local government office and lived with her widowed mother in a small but comfortable flat. She was content with her life, for East Berlin was her home.

Hans-Peter, then twenty-one, was a student living in West Berlin: after their initial meeting he paid several visits to Margit at her home.



Their relationship developed and the more they saw of each other the more they wanted to be together. But, as with many of those whose motive for escaping to the West was the powerful force of love, Margit had never considered leaving her place of birth. The thought of having to escape in order to enjoy a life of freedom together did not occur to the young couple.

Their first thought was to become engaged, and this was followed by an application for a marriage licence. But Hans and Margit knew within themselves that as with all such applications the chances of success were slim. They had put down their intended home after marriage as 'West Berlin', and given Hans' address. Because of this they were informed that Margit would have to have an exit visa.

She applied for this, and the couple waited. Weeks went by, then months, with their hopes dwindling with time itself. The matter was out of their hands, and while to them it was their whole future at stake, to the authorities it was just another application. When they finally asked if a decision had been made they were told the visa had been refused. This automatically ruled out the application for a marriage licence.

The couple were disillusioned but never gave up hope. They sent in further applications, again the months of waiting, and again the refusals. They were determined that their life together was not going to be ruined, yet the uncertainty, the seemingly impossible situation they had been put in, and the steadily fading hope of ever being together as man and wife, was putting an unbearable tension on their relationship.

Several evenings a week Hans-Peter would drive through Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin and then home again to the West. His

documents were always minutely inspected, and his large Opel Saloon thoroughly checked for hidden compartments and the like by the border guards. He had considered this method of bringing Margit to the West, but each time the guards inspected his car they confirmed the stupidity and pointlessness of trying an escape which would have such a limited chance of success.

Each time he passed through the checkpoint he looked for inspiration, for something which would plant the germ of an idea in his mind as to how he could free Margit.

Hans had a vivid imagination, like many other young people. It was this imagination, coupled with his preoccupation with escape, which enabled him to notice the small incident which was to have such a major bearing on his life. He had stopped at Checkpoint Charlie on his return to West Berlin after an evening with Margit and her mother at their flat. He waited patiently in his car in a queue of traffic, as the travellers' documents were checked and their cars searched. The car immediately in front of him was a small white German sports car with a young girl at the wheel. Suddenly a guard started yelling and within seconds two of them stood, machine guns poised, one on each side of the hood.

The car had slid forward and jerked to a halt with the hood scraping the underneath of the heavy wooden barrier. The handbrake had not been properly secured, and the guards were soon satisfied.

There were two barriers, one at each end of the huge compound, and instinctively Hans found himself making a mental note of their approximate height, which he gauged at three feet when they were in the lowered, horizontal position. He was waved on through the barrier, and as he continued home through the dark-

ness and the drizzle that covered the city that night, he was already forming the idea of yet another way to beat the barrier that separated him from the woman he loved.

The next time he went into East Berlin it was with a plan already forming in his mind, and he carried an all-important tape measure with him. He drove slowly past the barrier, carefully gauging the height of the horizontal pole against the car, and once inside the compound he walked slowly around the car while the guards meticulously searched its inside. With his finger he traced a light line in the dust on the fender of the car corresponding to the height of the barrier. The check finished he moved on into East Berlin, and at the first opportunity stopped to measure the height of the mark on his car's fender. It was fractionally over one metre. He was going to take a car *under* the barrier, and that was the maximum height he could allow if the car he intended to use was not to be crushed by the defensive bar.

When he returned through the barrier he once again checked the height ... one metre; a couple of centimetres would mean the difference between life and death, capture and escape in his daring plan to take Margit to the West. He now started his search in earnest for the car which would ensure him enough clearance under the barrier. Used car dealers, advertisements, car-hire firms. Each day for four days he spent hour after hour looking for a car, whatever the make or condition, which had the one specification he needed ... a height of no more than one metre.

When he found the car, it was a British-made Austin Healey Sprite belonging to a car-hire firm. He signed the necessary papers, hired the car for a week, and checked it thoroughly to make sure it would not let him down at the crucial moment. He went back through

Checkpoint Charlie and knew then that with the detachable windshield taken away it could slide beneath the horizontal pole.

He told Margit and her mother about the plan that same night, and when it was dark took her out in the car and showed her where he was going to hide her to smuggle her through the checkpoint. In spite of the small size of the car, he knew it would not be too uncomfortable for Margit to lie behind the front seats; but he could not leave her widowed mother behind. He worked out a way in which she could crouch behind the seats, and told her that she too would be coming to the freedom of the West. Both Margit and her mother knew they would be risking their lives in the escape attempt; Margit felt there was no choice, that she could not live a life apart from Hans, and this was the only way they could be together. For her mother, Margit's happiness was all that mattered. Once her daughter had gone, she would have nothing left to live for. To spend her last years near Margit in the West was something she longed for, and for this she too would risk her own life.

Hans went to an old deserted bomb site in West Berlin and simulated the conditions of the compound at the checkpoint. It was about a hundred metres long, and across the road there were three steel-reinforced concrete walls over a metre high and built to withstand any emergency. The walls had been built in such a position that any car or other vehicles going either in or out had to slow down to no more than a few kilometres an hour around the Z-shaped route.

Hans knew that for his plan to succeed speed would be the main necessity. To build up a safe but effective speed could only be done by constant practice. Speed was to provide the element of surprise. If he could catch the

guards while they were unaware of what he was trying to do, then the plan had a chance of success. He knew they would draw their pistols, and the machine guns would be in evidence. He just hoped they would not have time to use them.

He relentlessly practised his freedom drive on the old bomb site, using garbage cans and bricks and rubble as obstacles around which to drive; each time a little faster, a little surer, until he knew every movement of the small car under his control. The speed rose until he could manoeuvre the car around the closely spaced obstacles at about twenty kilometres an hour without throwing it out of control.

On May 15th 1963 he drove into East Berlin in the car. He was ready. He arrived at Margit's house at about six o'clock that evening and planned the return journey for one a.m. the following morning. Between then and about 1.30 he hoped there would be very little traffic going through the checkpoint. He knew he could control his timing going into the checkpoint, so that there would be no vehicle going the same way to hamper his dash for freedom, but he could do nothing about what was coming the other way. This he had to leave to chance; that no other car would unintentionally block his way.

The two women dressed, put a few of their valuables in their pockets, and then squeezed themselves into their hiding places for the short but tense journey to the checkpoint. Hans slipped in behind the wheel, started the car, and began his drive along the Friedrichstrasse toward the checkpoint.

He stopped before the first barrier and waited for the guard to come from his hut to inspect his passport. His papers were in order: the guard nonchalantly turned and lifted the barrier so that the car, minus the windshield

that Hans had already taken down, could pass through.

The young Austrian drove slowly away, and then about twenty metres ahead of him

another guard appeared and signalled him to slow down and stop in the inspection bay.

He drove slowly, carefully toward the guard, giving no cause for suspicion: and then, when just a few metres from him, he put his foot down hard on the accelerator and swung the steering wheel. He pulled sharply to the left and could see the small opening in the concrete obstacles looming up in front of him. The silence was broken by the urgent shouting of the guards, as the car tires screamed and he pulled over to the right through the obstacles, then again, wrestling with the wheel, to the left to line the car up with the next gap.

The car, like a dog pulling at the leash, went on, staying steady under the strain of the weight and the violence of the movements.

The final gap, the horizontal barrier, was all that lay in the path of the car and its passengers, between them and freedom. The heavy pole lay barring the way to all traffic; on the other side of it the strong thickly set walls were just wide enough to allow a coach to squeeze through. There was no room for error, for hesitation. Hans gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles showed white through the flesh. His eyes fixed on the pole, the speedometer resting just past the forty kilometres an hour mark, he took one last look before ducking his head down for the vital seconds when he would pass under the barrier and drive blind.

The flash of timber was just centimetres above his head—and Hans knew that his judgment had been good. The car had squeezed under the barrier, and the element of surprise had given him enough time to get away with-



out being brought to a halt by the bullets of the guards.

It had all taken but a few seconds. Back at his home in West Berlin he held Margit close to him, happy in the knowledge that now they would be free to marry. And a few months

later, with Margit's mother holding back tears of happiness and relief, the young couple were married at the Schoeneberg Registry Office and settled down to life in their new home in West Germany. ■

## Activities

1. Work in a small group to discuss this piece. To what extent are these love stories? What elements of romance they contain? Using your group discussion as a starting point, write a ballad that tells the story of one of the escapes.
2. Pretend you are Hans-Peter Meixner. Write a list of pros and cons he might have considered as he created the plan. If you were his mother or father, what advice would you give him as he decides his course of action?
3. Work in small groups to prepare a news broadcast telling one of these stories. Choose to be either West Germans or East Germans. Consider how each side would view the escape and reflect that view in your newscast. Experiment with "loaded language" to demonstrate your understanding of how the connotation of words affects the message that is being given. Videotape your presentation for the class to view.

# Small Mercies: A Boy After War

ERNEST HILLEN



*This incident takes place at the end of the Second World War. Ernest Hillen and his family have just been released from a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Conditions in the camp were brutal, and among those who did not survive was Hubie, Ernest's best friend. Now the Hillens have emigrated to Canada, and Ernest must begin to adjust to life in peacetime.*

The first day of school, the third in Toronto, was amazing. My mother, but especially my father, had endlessly insisted—starting the first day out of camp!—on how important, how necessary school was. I'd have to work hard, yes, to “catch up,” but it would be so interesting, so enjoyable. It would be boring at best, I was certain, and probably awful; also, school was

#### **Focus Your Learning**

Reading this story will help you:

- develop an understanding of theme
- consider other perspectives
- interview a character
- write a free-verse poem
- write instructions

surely connected with “discipline,” one of my father’s favourite words. So I was nervous that morning, not happy. Find the Boys Entrance, my mother said, and then the Office: I was expected. Should she come along? Please *no*. A three-minute trot from Osborne Avenue, Kimberley Public School was a two-storey red-brick massive block of a building with tall wide windows and all around a fenced-in yard of crushed cinder—already filled with hundreds of running, shrieking children. I’d never seen so many together! Eyes down, I marched through them in the short-pants English-boy suit and Hubie’s extra-polished riding boots—my best outfit. A man holding a bell guarded the Boys Entrance. Up the stairs and to the right I’d see the Office sign, he said. Wide wooden stairs, worn to a slope in the centre, not so clean—and then the smell hit me. A strange wonderful smell. I sucked it in. I’d discover it was made up of many different smells: ink, glue, wood, carbolic soap, wood oils, wet wool, paint, dust, fresh sweat, stale sweat, soured milk, old food, running shoes. It was the smell of school.

A woman in a long-sleeved dark-brown dress waited in the Office—tall with a large high bosom, a head full of small brown curls, brown eyes swimming huge behind rimless glasses, and a tiny mouth. *She was Miss Tock, my teacher, she said smiling, and I was in grade six. She spoke very clearly in a soft voice; I would never hear her raise it. We should go to class before the bell and find me a good seat, all right?*

Yep, I said.

Not speaking, we climbed more stairs, walked down an empty hardwood-floor hall, footsteps clapping, and turned into a high-ceilinged room crowded with rows of one-piece wooden desk seats. In the back was an alcove where I had to hang up my coat. Miss Tock pointed to the second seat of the centre row that faced her desk. She turned to the blackboard behind her, wiped off other writing with her left hand, and in red chalk wrote ERNEST HILLEN with her right; her hands were as small as a girl’s. I looked around me. Thirty desks at least, and the walls, and also the lower halves of the windows, jammed with drawings, paintings, cut-outs, photographs of animals and flowers, mountains and waterfalls, the largest map I’d ever seen, of Canada, and in a corner on top of a cupboard a globe—I knew about globes!—and a large grey stuffed bird. A bell rang faintly outside and then a roaring wave of shrill voices and thumps and clatter surged up stairs and bowled down halls. I stared hard at the top of my desk; a lidded inkwell sat in a hole in the upper right-hand corner. Kids came stomping into the room, breathing hard, flopped down with groans; not speaking, though. In a moment it grew still. I felt the eyes on me, kept my head down. The desk’s surface was a blur of inked and carved doodles and of hearts, arrows, numbers, and initials.

In front of me I heard a light tapping, and I *had* to look up. Miss Tock

stood behind her desk holding a ruler. Kids were rising around me, stepping out of their desks to the right. I did, too. Roll-call? *Bowing?*

Miss Tock tapped her desk again.

"God save our gracious King," she began to sing and the class at once joined in. I knew that song. British soldiers bellowed it. The children sang as if they'd sung it many times before. I hummed along, eyes on Miss Tock. "God save the King!" it ended.

Miss Tock put the ruler on her desk, clasped her hands in front of her, lowered her head.

"Our Father who art in Heaven," she began and the class joined in. A prayer. I dropped my head, too. I was pretty sure I'd heard the prayer before, in Dutch. Was this done every day in school, singing and praying?

"Amen."

The children quietly slid into their seats. Me, too.

Miss Tock didn't sit down. She pointed to the blackboard and then, smiling at me, said my name. In her clear way, she said *Ernest* had just arrived in Canada, and he was *Dutch*.

I watched her little mouth.

*This was Ernest's first day in school, and lucky for them he'd be in their class! Welcome Ernest!*

Welcome Ernest, the class muttered.

*If you were Dutch, Miss Tock said, that usually meant you came from Holland. Did anyone know where Holland was?*

A hand was raised to my left.

Yes?

A girl stepped out of her desk.

Europe, Miss Tock.

*Correct.*

The girl sat down.

But *Ernest*, Miss Tock said, did *not* come to Canada from Holland. *He* came from a country that *belonged* to Holland—what was called a *colony*—and *that* country was named the *Dutch East Indies*. Had anyone heard of the *Dutch East Indies*?

No hands.

It was a *country* made up of *thousands of islands*, and Ernest came from the *island of Java*. Who had heard of *Java*?

No hands.

I felt two light pats on my back, like a "hello." I didn't turn around.

Well, said Miss Tock, Java was *almost* on the *other side* of the *world* and they'd learn about it *later*. Because of the *war*, she said, Ernest had *missed* a *bit of schooling*, but *she* thought he would *fit just fine* in grade six. Didn't *Ernest* think so, *too*?





Yep, I said. I still felt all those eyes, but it was interesting, talking about me.

Ernest had been *speaking English* only for a *short while*, said Miss Tock, so *he* was still *learning* it. But then *none of you*, she said looking around the class, can speak *Dutch*, can you?

It was a little joke.

Was there *anything* she'd said *so far*, she asked me smiling, that I had *not understood*?

Nope, I said.

Learning a *new language* is *hard work*, said Miss Tock, *especially* if *everybody* around you knows *only that* language and you can't use *your* language. Does anyone *here* speak *another* language?

The hand of the boy in front of me flew up.

Miss Tock nodded at him.

The boy stepped out of his seat.

His father knew French, Miss Tock.

*Thank you.*

The boy sat down.

From *now on*, Miss Tock said looking at me, smiling again, I could *put up my hand*—as I'd *seen* the *others* do—and tell her at *any time* if I did *not* understand something. Would I *promise* to *do* that?

Yep, I said, smiling back at her. Clearly Miss Tock liked me. Well, I liked her, too.

The brown eyes rested on me, patiently swimming, the small mouth went on smiling. It was very still.

Holy cow! I suddenly understood—and shot out of my desk.

"Yes, Miss Tock," I said, standing straight.

"*Thank you, Ernest,*" she said.

Another friendly pat on my back.

Miss Tock said the class was going to read now, and I could just sit and listen; next time I'd have my own book. Kids rummaged in their desk drawers. Mine was empty.

Miss Tock called a child's name, and he or she would read out loud standing up until Miss Tock said thank you, said another name, and then that kid would read.

The bell rang. Books were tossed back inside the desks. Children rose. A hand on my shoulder turned me around: it was the patter. An open, friendly face, blue eyes, neatly combed shiny wavy blond hair the colour of Hubie's, golden.

C'mon! he said, and taking my elbow tugged me toward the door. I looked at Miss Tock, but she was talking to a girl.

It was OK, the boy said. Recess.



What, I wondered, was “recess?” Coat? I asked.

Nah, said the boy.

In the hallway we plunged into a river of hurrying kids, boys and girls, little ones, big ones, all talking, all making fast for the stairs; no running, though. The blond boy concentrated on slipping past those ahead, taking the stairs sometimes three at a time; I could do that.

Outside the Boys Entrance he stopped.

He was Ronald Glenesk, he said, squinting in the sudden bright daylight. What about baseball?

Yep. I said.

Had I played it?

Nope.

Had I *seen* it played?

Nope.

Never mind, he said, c’mon! and started running to the far side of the yard; I tried to keep up. Other boys our size were hurrying in the same direction. And then I lost Ronnie and I was alone in the middle of a loudly squabbling group of about twenty. One or two slapped me on the back, another on my arm. Friendly? Were they friendly slaps? They wore long pants, jackets with zippers, running shoes, and there was I in a pale-grey short-pants suit and riding boots. Oh God—I’d have to fight! No choice. No escape. I’d known it since I woke up: new boys always had to fight. All over the world—that’s how it was. I balled my fists. Leather boots at least, against running shoes. All the dim days in camp, new boys had to fight, dizzy or not dizzy, sores or no sores—the rule of the tough; my rule, too. You didn’t like fighting? Too bad. Scared? Too bad. Did I still know *how*? God, I hadn’t fought for six, seven months, not since before Hubie . . .

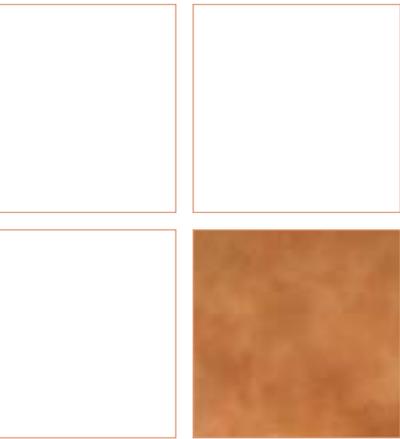
Same team, Ernie! said a smiling Ronnie, suddenly beside me again. C’mon! and he jogged over to the corner of the yard’s fence. Some boys quickly fanned out facing the corner; three of them busily scuffed up small mounds of cinders. Ronnie pointed to the mounds and, speaking fast, said that was First Base, that Second Base, that Third, and this was Home, where we were standing. His face was red, from running, from the cold. Someone handed him a bat. He passed it to me. I was First At Bat, he said, because I was the new guy. This was how I should grip it and swing it—and he showed me. The kid straight ahead holding the ball, he was the Pitcher. He’d throw the ball and I had to hit it and then run like hell to First Base. That was all for now. Three swings, OK?

OK.

Ronnie joined a bunch of boys to the side, leaving me alone clutching the bat, except for a kid squatting behind me. I could feel a lot of eyes.

Play ball! Play ball! voices yelled.





I watched the Pitcher. A tall boy, he first twisted his body oddly and then threw the ball—but much too fast. I swung anyway, and almost fell over.

The squatter caught it though, and tossed it back to the Pitcher.

Nice swing, Ernie! Ronnie shouted. And others did, too—Nice swing, Ernie!

The Pitcher swivelled and threw the ball. Too fast again. I swung hard, but stayed on my feet. On whose side was the Pitcher?

Way to go, Ernie!

Way to go!

Nice try!

The squatter returned the ball. Whose side was *he* on?

This time the Pitcher swung himself half around and threw the ball—like a bullet. Not a ball that could be hit.

Strike three! somebody called. I laid the bat down. There was then some disagreement in Ronnie's group. Strange game: so far the only people who'd played were the Pitcher and me, and the squatter, I supposed. Everybody else, the boys fanned out in front and the ones to the side, just stood around. And then a voice from the side yelled:

*"Give 'im another chance!"*

Yeah! came a second voice.

Another chance! from a third.

Some of the boys in front of me were then shouting it, too. Weren't they the enemy?

Another chance!

Another chance!

Give 'im another chance!

In the wintry sunshine it was like a chant.

Ronnie ambled over, grinning, and said I was still At Bat. I could try a few more hits.

The Pitcher then didn't do his body trick, he just lobbed the ball over, and I almost hit it.

Attaboy, Ernie!

Attaboy!

Attaboy!

Shouts and yells from all over. No question, I was getting the hang of it.

The Pitcher tossed again, and I felt sure the bat touched the ball, though the ball didn't change direction.

Close one, Ernie!

*Close, close, close!*

The next ball came at me like a kiss, in the sweetest, slowest way, just reaching for the bat—and I *whacked* it. It rolled in a fine straight line to the Pitcher.

And there was shouting! There was cheering. There was hand-clapping. The boy on First Base jumped up and down. I got the craziest feeling and clamped down my jaws. It was just as if I was going to cry.

Nice *hit*, Ernie!

Way to go!

Attaboy!

C'mon! *Another* one!

And I did. I hit that ball several more times. The Pitcher kept throwing, I kept swinging, the squatter kept catching, and then the bell rang.

Nice going! said Ronnie as we trotted back to the Boys Entrance. Inside the school I breathed in the smell.

When the lunch bell rang I ran home fast. There was a lot to tell; my mother would have questions. Over Campbell's tomato soup and a grilled cheese sandwich in the kitchen, I reported on the *thousands* of kids in the yard, the smell, the noise, Miss Tock, Grade Six, the gashed desk, Ronnie, and baseball. ■

## Activities

1. Ernest expects the worst on his first day of school. Reread the section in which he anticipates what will happen on his first day. Compare this with what actually happens. What do his expectations tell you about his past experiences? How has the author used the baseball game to help develop an understanding of the theme of the story?
2. As Ronnie, write a journal entry, retelling the story from your point of view. Include details and descriptions from the story, as well as your interpretation of the events of that day.
3. As an adult, Ernest becomes a famous writer. Work with a partner to role-play a TV interview with Ernest. One partner plays the interviewer, the other partner plays Ernest. Develop a list of questions an interviewer might ask Ernest about his childhood experience of immigration. Use examples from the story to create Ernest's responses.
4. Make sure you demonstrate his feelings and memories about that first day of school. Videotape your interview or perform it live for the class.
4. Pretend that you are from another culture. This is the only story you have ever read about Canadian children, so you assume that this is what they are all like. Write a free-verse poem about Canadian children, using only what you know from this story.
5. Ernest had never played baseball before. The students gave him clear directions on how to play the game. Pick your favourite sport or activity and write a set of instructions to help someone who has never experienced it before. Make sure your instructions are step by step and logical. Trade instructions with a partner and assess the instructions for clarity and completeness.

## End-of-unit Activities

1. Working with a group, choose one of the stories or poems in this unit and create a video adaptation. Read your choice carefully and divide it into scenes. Plan where each scene should be taped, who will play each character, what props will be needed. Consider using sound effects and music. Show your video to the class.
2. Pick one of the stories or poems in the section. Design a children's book using the story line as the basis for your book. Consider how the pictures contribute to details and development of your story. Share your story with a younger family member, or visit an elementary classroom and share your story there.
3. Work with a partner to research mythology and legends. Find a myth or legend that appeals to you and prepare an oral telling of the piece. Practise your storytelling. Develop a sense of voice, articulation, stresses, etc. Consider using sound effects and dialogue to help listeners follow the story. Present your story to the class.
4. Research one of the topics presented in this unit: mythological beings, environmental concerns, women's issues, legends, immigration experiences. Pick an area that is of interest to you. Do some preliminary research to help you gain an understanding of the breadth of your topic. Use strategies to narrow your topic to a manageable one. Prepare a learning station that includes visuals, writing, and perhaps hands-on activity. When everyone has completed their stations, spend some time discussing what you have learned. You might invite parents or members of other classes to share your learning.
5. Throughout this section you have read about some very strong and courageous women. Pick two of these women and write an essay in which you compare their personalities and achievements. Use details from the stories to help you explain your comparisons. Share your planning and drafts with a friend, who will help you to edit for clarity and organization. Look at some of your previous writing and make sure you are not making the same mistakes.
6.
  - a) In your opinion, which is the best visual in this unit? Write a brief summary explaining your thoughts. Make sure you use examples to defend your opinion.
  - b) Pick a visual you feel is not a good fit for the unit, and write a summary of your reasons. Find another visual or draw one yourself, and explain why you think your choice is better.
7. Throughout this unit you have learned and reviewed examples of figurative language and literary techniques. Review your notes and the activities you have completed. Prepare a booklet of terms and definitions, giving at least three examples. You might illustrate your booklet.
8. Pick your favourite piece in this unit and create a collage to represent its theme. Make it specific enough that other students can recognize the source, but add your own creative ideas.
9. Look back at "In the Silence," "The Time of the Wolves," "Black Hull," and others, and create a list of unfamiliar words you find. Try to determine the meaning of the words from the context, or the rest of the sentence around it. Then look up the word in the dictionary. Compare your meaning with the dictionary version. Adjust your definition as necessary. Write your own sentence using the word correctly, demonstrating you know what it means.
10. Pick one of the themes of this unit and create a poetry anthology expanding on it. Select poems from other books and/or write your own poems to create a booklet of poems. You might illustrate your poems to reflect your theme.