



WINTER BREAK LEARNING PACKET

ELA

**6TH GRADE
STUDENT**

DEC 22ND – JAN 5TH

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

Memphis-Shelby County Schools offers educational and employment opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, sex, creed, age, disability, national origin, or genetic information



Memphis-Shelby County Schools
6-8 myPerspectives Reading Topics by Unit



Research is Clear

- Students are able to build their vocabulary faster when they read multiple books, articles, and other texts on the same topic.
- When students are unfamiliar with a topic, it is harder for them to understand what they are reading and to learn new words.
- Reading several books, articles, and other texts on the same topic allows students to learn more and to learn faster.
- Students who read 20 minutes a day/5 days a week outside of classrooms are exposed to 1.8 million words in one school year and have an increase in critical thinking.

-NESCA, 2021

How Parents Can Help

- Below is a list of unit topics that are areas of focus throughout each grade levels' myPerspectives curriculum.
- By encouraging students to read about these topics at home, students have an opportunity to deepen their background knowledge. This will further support them in being prepared to learn in class!
- Students can use the same single sign on credentials used at school to access their myPerspectives online dashboard at home. Click [here](#) for more details regarding the student dashboard.

Sixth Grade

Unit 1- Childhood: What are some of the challenges and triumphs of growing up?

Unit 2- Animal Allies: How can people and animals relate to each other?

Unit 3- Modern Technology: How is modern technology helpful and harmful to society?

Unit 4- Imagination: Where can imagination lead?

Unit 5- Exploration: What drives people to explore?

Seventh Grade

Unit 1- Generations: What can one generation learn from another?

Unit 2- A Starry Home: Should we make a home in space?

Unit 3- Turning Points: What can cause a sudden change in someone's life?

Unit 4- People and the Planet: What effects do people have on the environment?

Unit 5- Facing Adversity: How do we overcome obstacles?

Eighth Grade

Unit 1- Rites of Passage: What are some milestones on the path to growing up?

Unit 2- The Holocaust: How do we remember the past?

Unit 3- What Matters: When is it right to take a stand?

Unit 4- Human Intelligence: In what different ways can people be intelligent?

Unit 5- Invention: Are inventions realized through inspiration or perspiration?

Note: The topics listed above align with texts that students will explore during the specified unit. In most cases, each middle school grade level will engage with 1 unit per quarter (i.e., Quarter1=Unit 1).

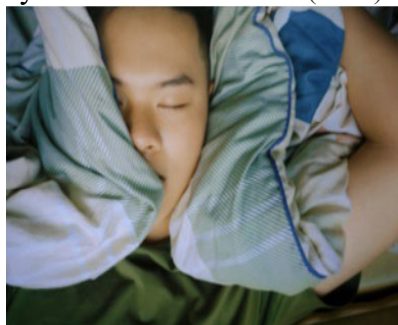
The Big 3 Reading Questions...Great Questions to Discuss After Reading!

- What's something you read today and what was the most interesting part about it?
- Did you learn any new or difficult words? What do they mean?
- What was the most important part about what you read?

Literacy Support Parent Guide

For Teens, A Good Mood Depends on Good Sleep

by Meenaskshi Prabhune (2017)



In this section of the Literacy Support Guide, we're reading anchor text, "For Teens, A Good Mood Depends on Good Sleep" by Meenaskshi Prabhune. In "For Teens, A Good Mood Depends on Good Sleep," Meenaskshi Prabhune focuses on the importance of rest and its impact on adolescent brain development.

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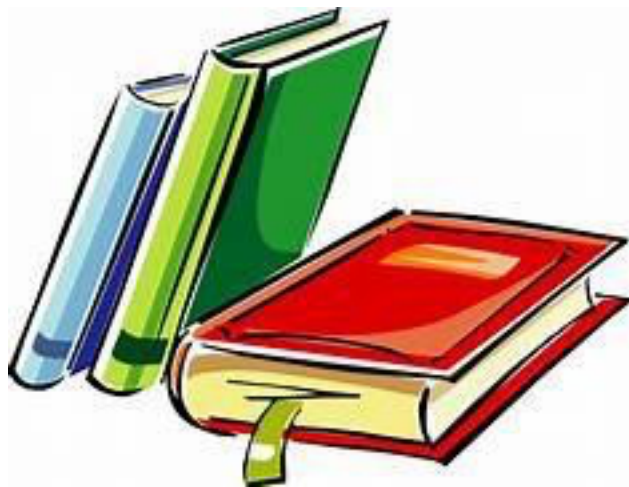
Ways to Support your Child

1. Ask your child what the informational texts: "For Teens, A Good Mood Depends on Good Sleep" and the paired text, "Should Your School Day Start Later?" are about?
2. **Parent Answer Keys**-Review written responses together

Related Media

1. Watch the following clips with your child at home.
 - ['School for tired teens'](#)
 - ['Can You Get Too Much Sleep?'](#)

ANCHOR TEXT



Name: _____

Class: _____

For Teens, A Good Mood Depends on Good Sleep

Sleeping less than eight hours — or more than 10 — makes teenagers feel worse the next day

By Meenaskshi Prabhune
2017

How many hours of sleep do you get a night? Likely not as much as Andrew Fuligni finds teenagers should get in his new study. In this informational text, Meenaskshi Prabhune discusses how many hours of sleep teenagers should get each night to be at their best the next day. As you read, take notes on why teenagers may not be getting enough sleep.

- [1] For families with teenagers, school nights may fall into a familiar pattern. Parents urge their kids to go to bed early. But teens would rather stay up late. Maybe they have homework or want to spend time with friends. Or maybe it's just hard to fall asleep. But a new study confirms that adolescents¹ need eight to 10 hours of sleep at night to feel their best the next day.



"Untitled" by minh đô is licensed under CC0.

As kids reach adolescence, they often face increasing workloads and responsibilities. But they are not yet adults. Their bodies and brains are still changing. As a result, "Their sleep needs are like that of a developing child," says Rafael Pelayo. He is a sleep doctor at the Stanford Center for Sleep Sciences and Medicine in California. He was not involved in the new study.

"Adolescence is sometimes referred to as the 'perfect storm' of problems of sleep," says Pelayo. On the one hand, teens need regular sleep to be mentally and physically healthy. But their internal clocks² shift during this period. Their bodies want to stay awake later at night and sleep later in the morning. School still starts early, though. As a result, Pelayo estimates that 80 to 90 percent of teens do not get enough sleep.

That missed sleep has consequences.³ Sleep-deprived kids are more prone⁴ to mental and physical illnesses. Sleepy drivers face a heightened risk of car accidents — the top cause of teenage death. But too much sleep can have its own problems, such as leaving teens with a sour mood upon waking.

1. **Adolescent** (*noun*) a young person in the process of developing from a child into an adult
2. a system in the body that controls when a person sleeps, eats, and performs other necessary functions
3. **Consequence** (*noun*) something that happens as a result of an action or set of conditions
4. **Prone** (*verb*) more likely to suffer from something

Sleep affects mood

- [5] Andrew Fuligni studies the mental health of adolescents at the University of California, Los Angeles. He wanted to understand which sleep habits help teens feel and perform their best. To find out, his team surveyed 419 students. Each was between the ages of 13 and 19. Every day for two weeks, these volunteers recorded when they fell asleep and woke up. They also rated their moods and feelings the next day, such as their happiness, anxiety and pain.

Most students reported good moods after a night of eight to 10 hours of sleep. "Too much sleep and too little sleep are both extremes," says Pelayo. And both were linked with problems.

Within that eight-to-10-hour range, older kids seemed to need the least sleep. "A 17- or 18-year-old does not need as much sleep as a 14-year-old in order to function on a daily basis," Fuligni found. But, he adds, "They still need a sizeable amount of sleep."

The team published its findings August 18 in the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*.

Even among kids the same age, everyone needed a slightly different amount of sleep to feel good. One reason could be health issues that differ among them. For instance, in the new study, kids with anxiety and depression seemed to need more sleep to function well.

- [10] Sleep is a lot like appetite, Pelayo says. Just as people eat different amounts of food daily, sleep patterns between healthy people also may differ.

Choosing snoozing

Biologically,⁵ kids' bodies shift toward a later schedule during the teenage years. "They become more like night owls and less like early risers," says Fuligni. But despite the change in their internal body clocks, school start times and other schedules don't change.

"We have set up a system that's very difficult for many teenagers and some kids who might be at risk of mental and behavioral health problems," he concludes.

One way to help teens get enough sleep is to have school start later. Some school districts have already done this. They've found that the later times let kids sleep more. They also have seen fewer car accidents, higher test scores and better graduation rates. Because of this, California lawmakers are trying to change school start times in their state. If they succeed, California middle and high schools could start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

But until schools change their start times, teenagers have to help themselves. Pelayo suggests teens sleep for 10 hours each night for a week or two. This will help them figure out how much sleep they need to feel their best.

5. related to the science of the body

- [15] Sleeping more on weekends to make up for missing sleep during the week isn't a good idea, though. Fuligni warns that getting different amounts of sleep each night can be bad for mental health.

Pelayo agrees. "The amount of sleep you get on weekdays and weekends should be the same," he says. We don't starve ourselves of food on weekdays and gorge on weekends, he points out. We shouldn't do that with sleep either.

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. Older teenagers function better during the day if they are allowed to take several short naps.
 - B. Adults require 8-10 hours of sleep a night to remain healthy, while teenagers require even more sleep.
 - C. Depending on their age and personal needs, teenagers require about 8-10 hours of sleep a night to stay healthy.
 - D. When teenagers fall asleep, their unique biology prevents them from staying asleep for the recommended 8-10 hours.

2. Which quotation best provides a reason why teenagers struggle to get enough sleep?
 - A. "Sleep-deprived kids are more prone to mental and physical illnesses." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "'A 17- or 18-year-old does not need as much sleep as a 14-year-old in order to function on a daily basis,' Fuligni found." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "despite the change in their internal body clocks, school start times and other schedules don't change." (Paragraph 11)
 - D. "Sleeping more on weekends to make up for missing sleep during the week isn't a good idea, though." (Paragraph 15)

3. How does paragraph 13 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
 - A. It shows how easy it is for schools to allow teenagers to sleep longer.
 - B. It emphasizes the positive outcomes of starting school later for teenagers.
 - C. It points out how uncommon it is for teenagers to go to school later in the U.S.
 - D. It explains why many states are hesitant to start school at a later time.

4. What is the author's main purpose in the text?
 - A. to argue that all schools should start later in the day
 - B. to warn teens about the dangers of staying up late
 - C. to compare the sleep patterns of teens and adults
 - D. to explore what the right amount of sleep is for teenagers

5. What is the relationship between teenagers' internal clocks and school schedules? Use evidence from the text in your answer.

Discussion Questions

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

1. How many hours of sleep do you get a night? Do you think this is enough? What is the perfect amount of sleep for you and why?
2. In the text, the author explains why sleep is so important for teenagers. How does the sleep impact their emotional health and their performance in school? Describe a time when you got too much or too little sleep and how you felt the next day.
3. In the text, the author discusses some schools' decisions to make start times later. Do you think this would be a good idea? What time do you think would be the best time to start school and why?

PAIRED TEXT



Name: _____

Class: _____

Should Your School Day Start Later?

By Steph Smith
2022

Steph Smith outlines a debate over school start times.

As you read, take notes on the evidence used to support the arguments in the text.

- [1] As your phone's alarm blares, you slowly open one eye. How can it be morning already? It seems like it was only a few hours ago that you finished your homework.

You close your eyes for just a few more minutes, but then your mom bangs on the door: "Time to get up or you'll miss the bus!"

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Many teens struggle to get enough sleep. But when schools switched to remote learning in 2020 because of the pandemic,¹ classes often began later. That, combined with many students not having to commute² to school, allowed teens to get some extra shut-eye.



"Untitled" by Maximilian Simson is licensed under CC0.

Now, after returning to in person classes, a number of schools are going back to their earlier start times. But some kids are trying to change that. For example, in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, a group of students have formed an organization called Cherry Hill Students for Later School Start Times. It wants local middle and high schools to push back the start of the school day to 8:30 a.m. (Currently, middle schools in Cherry Hill start at 8 a.m., and high schools start at 7:30.)

- [5] In fact, schools in several states have switched to later start times in recent years. Research shows that inadequate³ sleep can negatively affect students' health and grades.

But not everyone thinks kids should be sleeping in. Opponents⁴ say starting classes later is expensive for school districts and limits students' time for after-school activities.

Do we need a wake-up call when it comes to school start times? Keep reading, then decide what you think.

1. an outbreak of disease that affects people across different continents
2. to ride or drive a long distance to and from work or school
3. **Inadequate** (*adjective*) not good enough
4. **Opponent** (*noun*) a person who takes the other side in a fight, game, or argument

Let Kids Sleep In

Starting the school day too early can deprive teens of much-needed sleep, experts say. According to the Sleep Foundation, nearly 60 percent of middle school students and more than 70 percent of high school students in the U.S. aren't getting the recommended 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep a night.

Studies show that well-rested teens are more likely to get good grades and less likely to be in car accidents or suffer from depression.⁵

- [10] What's more, experts say, teens are biologically⁶ wired to fall asleep later at night. As a result, some students may get as few as five hours of sleep before they need to be up for their first class.

As Aiden Rood, the co-founder of Cherry Hill Students for Later School Start Times, explains: "Kids are safer and healthier in general when they start later, and they do better in school."

You Snooze, You Lose?

Many school districts, however, say delaying the start of the school day would create a number of challenges.

For starters, districts would have to reschedule school buses — and perhaps pay for more of them. There's also the concern that later school start times could leave some kids walking home in the dark.

Shifting school hours could also create child care problems for some parents. In addition, opponents say, later school start times would leave teens with fewer hours for after-school activities and homework.

- [15] That's what Erin Isherwood, a parent in Chico, California, is worried about. The start time at her kids' high school was pushed back 45 minutes this year.

"My son has an exercise class that he absolutely loves at a gym" that was right after school last year, she explains. "[Now] he can't go."

Think It Over

Consider the pros and cons of pushing back school start times. Would a later schedule help you get more sleep? Or do you worry that it would leave you with less time for after-school activities?

5. **Depression** (*noun*) a common mental health condition that causes people to suffer from unexplained sad feelings that can last a long time

6. according to how a living thing grows, functions, or develops

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. Schools are considering starting later to help students get more sleep.
 - B. Parents want schools to start earlier because too many students sleep in.
 - C. Students want schools to start later so they have more time for after-school activities.
 - D. Schools are debating whether homework or after-school activities are more important.

2. How do paragraphs 1-3 contribute to the development of the central ideas of the text?
 - A. They connect the reader to the main problem that people are trying to solve.
 - B. They present a question about school that they want students to think about.
 - C. They describe what schools go through when deciding whether to change their schedule.
 - D. They compare a normal student's experience in the morning to students who wake up later.

3. Which statement describes the relationship between remote learning and school start times?
 - A. As a result of remote learning, students had to wake up earlier for school than before.
 - B. As a result of remote learning, students did not have homework so they started school earlier.
 - C. As a result of remote learning, students had a chance to experience later start times for school.
 - D. As a result of remote learning, students had fewer after-school activities so they started school later.

4. The word "deprive" in paragraph 8 most closely means —
 - A. to confuse.
 - B. to slow down.
 - C. to provide for.
 - D. to take away from.

5. After reading the article, which side of the argument does the author support with stronger evidence?

Discussion Questions

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

1. After reading the text, do you think schools should start later for middle school and high school students? Why or why not?
2. Which piece of evidence from the text do you think was most convincing and why? Which evidence was least convincing?
3. What is a school policy that you would like to change and why?

ANSWER KEYS



Answer key > For Teens, A Good Mood Depends on Good Sleep

by Meenaskshi Prabhune ● 2017

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?

6. RI.KID.2 ^

Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through details; provide an objective summary.

- A. Older teenagers function better during the day if they are allowed to take several short naps.
- B. Adults require 8-10 hours of sleep a night to remain healthy, while teenagers require even more sleep.
- C. Depending on their age and personal needs, teenagers require about 8-10 hours of sleep a night to stay healthy.**
- D. When teenagers fall asleep, their unique biology prevents them from staying asleep for the recommended 8-10 hours.

2. Which quotation best provides a reason why teenagers struggle to get enough sleep?

6. RI.KID.1 ^

Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw logical inferences; cite textual evidence to support conclusions.

- A. "Sleep-deprived kids are more prone to mental and physical illnesses." (Paragraph 4)
- B. "'A 17- or 18-year-old does not need as much sleep as a 14-year-old in order to function on a daily basis,' Fuligni found." (Paragraph 7)
- C. "despite the change in their internal body clocks, school start times and other schedules don't change." (Paragraph 11)**
- D. "Sleeping more on weekends to make up for missing sleep during the week isn't a good idea, though." (Paragraph 15)

3. How does paragraph 13 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? **6.RI.CS.5** ^

Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

- A. It shows how easy it is for schools to allow teenagers to sleep longer.
- B. It emphasizes the positive outcomes of starting school later for teenagers.**
- C. It points out how uncommon it is for teenagers to go to school later in the U.S.
- D. It explains why many states are hesitant to start school at a later time.

4. What is the author's main purpose in the text? **6.RI.CS.6** ^

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in a text.

- A. to argue that all schools should start later in the day
- B. to warn teens about the dangers of staying up late
- C. to compare the sleep patterns of teens and adults
- D. to explore what the right amount of sleep is for teenagers**

5. What is the relationship between teenagers' internal clocks and school schedules? Use evidence from the text in your answer. **6.RI.KID.3** ^

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and developed in a text.

Answers will vary; students should discuss how teenagers' internal clocks are encouraging them to stay up late while schools favor starting at an earlier time. The author discusses that during adolescence, teenagers' internal clocks shift and "their bodies want to stay awake later at night and sleep later in the morning" (Paragraph 3). Because of this, teenagers may stay up later, despite having to get up early for school. While teenagers' internal clocks are changing, "school start times and other schedules don't change" (Paragraph 11). This means teenagers do not get the necessary hours of sleep that they need. Lastly, students should discuss how the positive results of schools starting later further supports how students are negatively impacted by early schedules. Schools found that when they start later, they "have seen fewer car accidents, higher test scores and better graduation rates"

(Paragraph 13). Overall, schools' schedules do not compliment teenagers' internal clocks and they would function better if the two were more closely aligned.

Answer key > Should Your School Day Start Later?

by Steph Smith ● 2022

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?

6.RI.KID.2 ^

Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through details; provide an objective summary.

- A. **Schools are considering starting later to help students get more sleep.**
- B. Parents want schools to start earlier because too many students sleep in.
- C. Students want schools to start later so they have more time for after-school activities.
- D. Schools are debating whether homework or after-school activities are more important.

2. How do paragraphs 1-3 contribute to the development of the central ideas of the text?

6.RI.CS.5 ^

Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

- A. **They connect the reader to the main problem that people are trying to solve.**
- B. They present a question about school that they want students to think about.
- C. They describe what schools go through when deciding whether to change their schedule.
- D. They compare a normal student's experience in the morning to students who wake up later.

3. Which statement describes the relationship between remote learning and school start times?

6.RI.KID.3 ^

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and developed in a text.

- A. As a result of remote learning, students had to wake up earlier for school than before.
- B. As a result of remote learning, students did not have homework so they started school earlier.
- C. As a result of remote learning, students had a chance to experience later start times for school.**
- D. As a result of remote learning, students had fewer after-school activities so they started school later.

4. The word "deprive" in paragraph 8 most closely means —

6.RI.CS.4 ^

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

- A. to confuse.
- B. to slow down.
- C. to provide for.
- D. to take away from.**

5. After reading the article, which side of the argument does the author support with stronger evidence? 6.RI.IKI.8 ^

Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Answers will vary. Students should explain that the evidence in favor of later school start times uses stronger evidence because the author cites research about teen health and the evidence against later school times is simply predicting problems that might happen. The evidence in favor of later school time is more based in fact than opinion. Paragraph 8 states, "According to the Sleep Foundation, nearly 60 percent of middle school students and more than 70 percent of high school students in the U.S. aren't getting the recommended 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep a night." The author follows up this fact by saying, "What's more, experts say, teens are biologically wired to fall asleep later at night. As a result, some students may get as few as five hours of sleep before they need to be up for their first class" (Paragraph 10). These pieces of

evidence are scientific. The evidence for earlier start times are not as scientific. For example, in paragraph 14 the text states, "Shifting school hours could also create child care problems for some parents. In addition, opponents say, later school start times would leave teens with fewer hours for after-school activities and homework." These details are based on what opponents think might happen and what they think is more important. This is different from the evidence for later school times which uses science and thus supports a stronger argument.



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ELA

**6TH GRADE
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Literacy Support Parent Guide

A Present for Mrs. Robertson

by Meg Medina (2016)



In this section of the Literacy Support Guide, we're reading anchor text, "A Present for Mrs. Robertson" by Meg Medina. In "A Present for Mrs. Robertson" Maria Elisa finds the perfect gift for her favorite teacher, but it is not the gift she ends up giving.

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Ways to Support your Child

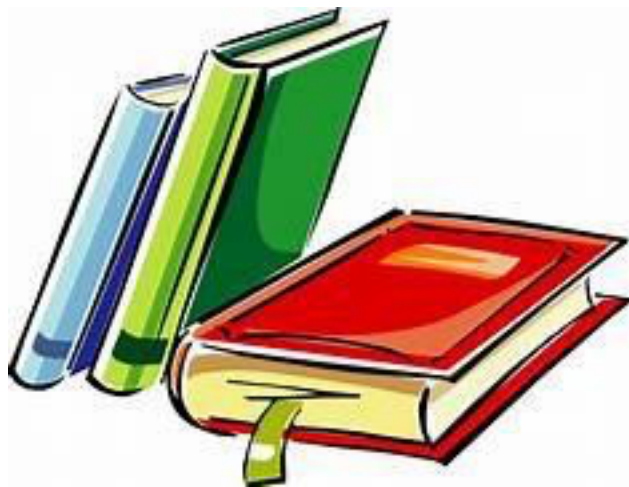
1. Ask your child what are the literary texts: "A Present for Mrs. Robertson" and the paired text, "Mother and Daughter" about?
2. **Parent Answer Keys**-Review written responses together

Related Media

Watch the following clips with your child at home.

- [Former Student Surprises High School Teacher Who Inspired Her to Excel](#)
- ['Abby's Closet welcomes all girls to pick up a free prom dress despite financial status'](#)

ANCHOR TEXT



Name: _____

Class: _____

A Present for Mrs. Robertson

By Meg Medina

2016

Meg Medina is a New York Times best-selling author. When she's not writing, she works on community projects that support girls, Latinx youth, and literacy. In this short story, a girl finds the perfect present for her teacher.

As you read, take notes on the interactions between Maria Elisa and Mrs. Robertson.

- [1] Charlene Venuti has a lazy eye that makes her lean over her papers at school, but that has never once stopped her from noticing everything about everybody, all the time. Like now.

"What are *you* getting Mrs. Robertson?" Charlene asks. "You have to tell." Emily and Kyoko look up from the cards they are drawing and wait.



"Untitled" by freestocks is licensed under CC0.

Friday is the last day before vacation and everyone will come to school with a present for our favorite fifth-grade teacher. The girls at Table Four have already gone shopping with their moms. Charlene bought earrings made of "almost real pearls," she says. Emily went to the ceramics studio on Long Island with her sister and painted a mug that they're going to fill with candies. Kyoko had her uncle bring back a pretty doll with a satin kimono from his business trip in Japan.

I reach for a scented marker and draw a blue snowflake. "It's a surprise," I say, taking in a whiff of fake blueberry. "But it's going to be perfect."

- [5] Charlene and Emily give each other a look that makes my stomach squeeze. *You're lying*, their eyes say as they go back to drawing their cards. I know that look. It's almost the same one they gave me when I was first assigned to Mrs. Robertson's class in September. *What are you doing here?* their eyes seemed to ask. I'll admit it: Even I was shocked to see that I'd be spending fifth grade in the top class. I'm not a genius like Charlene and the other kids in here, like Kyoko, who plays the violin or Sanjay, who does pre-algebra at the middle school every day at eleven. It's kind of a miracle, actually. Mrs. Mueller, my fourth-grade teacher, was always pointing out my sloppy desk with the papers sticking out, the holes I'd erased into my worksheets, the careless misspellings. "Slow down, Maria Elisa. Your mind is speeding too fast. Work carefully to let your ideas shine through!"

That's hard for me though, especially when I'm writing. Sometimes the ideas come to me so fast that my fingers just can't catch up to writing them. Maybe that was why they gave me to Mrs. Robertson. She is always telling us about new books to read. Still, I can't be sure, and Charlene has a different idea, of course.

"Mrs. Mueller is really old. She's going to retire in June," Charlene told me as part of her Table Four welcome wagon. "Maybe she's getting, you know, cuckoo, and made a mistake sending you here."

What I really want to know is who appointed Charlene chief of the Brain Police in this class? She acts like it's her mission to sniff out the less-than-gifted. You can't get a paper back without her wanting to know your grade, her High Holy Days being report card time.

"How many Excellents did you get?" she asked a few weeks ago when we got our first-quarter grades. I ignored her. I'd gotten mostly Gs, for *good*, and an Excelling in Language Arts.

- [10] Naturally, Charlene had a long row of Es in everything from spelling to work habits, and she's always bragging. Her record, she informed me, is fourteen, "but who's counting?"

You are, I wanted to shout up her nose. *That's who!*

If I were Mrs. Robertson, I'd give Charlene a big fat U (for unbelievably annoying) in social skills.

Anyway, I'm not telling her what I have planned for Mrs. Robertson. Today is finally payday for my mom, and I'll go shopping after school to get it. I've had my eye on this present for weeks, and I know Mrs. Robertson will always think of me when she takes care of it.

Just then, the overhead lights flash. It's our class signal to stop what we're doing and look up. The clock reads two thirty-five.

- [15] "Clean up time," Mrs. Robertson announces with her hand on the light switch. "Another afternoon has flown!"

I pack up my things and stack my chair on my desk. Then we line up, sweating in our coats as we wait for Mrs. Robertson to say good-bye. She takes her time with dismissal, but somehow it's still my favorite time. She doesn't sprint for her car the way some people do. (Yes, I saw you, Mrs. Mueller.) Instead, she says good-bye to each of us separately as we file past her in line. If you've had a bad day, she says, "Tomorrow will be better," and doesn't look grouchy. If you've done well on a test, she gives you a high five. She'll tie a small piece of yarn around your finger to remind you to bring a form back. Sometimes, she just says simple things, like "It was fun having you in my class today." No other teacher at Thomas Jefferson Elementary does that.

The beads of sweat are running down my back by the time she finally gets to me. I'm the tallest girl, so I'm always last. I hate this puffy coat. It's my old one from last year. The dirt stains won't come out, and my wrists peek through.

When it's my turn, Mrs. Robertson puts her hands on my overly padded shoulders. "That was a wonderful poem you wrote today, Maria Elisa. I'm still thinking about it!"

My whole inside goes even warmer. Mrs. Robertson is teaching us how to write poems, and we can write about anything that matters to us. Today I wrote about trash, which some people at Table Four said was a dumb topic. I don't care. Newspapers, plastic straws, and used coffee cups blow into our playground all the time, and I hate it.

[20] *Pollution is nasty; garbage is, too. Why isn't the sky a clear, clean blue.*

She read the whole thing out loud to the class.

"You're a poet and an environmental activist,"¹ she says as she flips off the lights and pulls the door closed.

"Thank you, Mrs. Robertson," I say.

And just like that, I forget all about how Charlene makes me feel.

* * *

[25] I take the long way home along Ellwood Avenue and stop to look in the store windows as I go. I want to make sure they haven't sold out of what I want to buy for Mrs. Robertson. The air outside is chilly enough to cut through my coat, and there's a metallic scent in the air that tells me snow is on the way. My breath makes little clouds on the glass as I look at all the things I'd like to buy myself if I could. New hairbands and rainbow colored toe-socks. A new hoodie. A three-tier art set that folds out like stairs with markers, watercolors, and color pastels.

I won't get any of that, though. Mami already warned me that we're going to have a "simple *Navidad*"² this year. That means one present for each of us. I hope she'll pick the art set and not another pair of "sturdy jeans at a good price" like last year. They look like farmer pants, and they were so stiff that I couldn't even bend my knees in gym class for a month.

The real problem is that Mami never "wastes money," and almost everything qualifies as "waste." She cuts my hair (which explains my crooked bangs), and we never eat out anywhere, not even french fries at Bustlin' Burgers, which has the best ones. Mami would be much happier getting a toaster than any fancy perfume.

But Mrs. Robertson isn't like Mami. She wears lipstick, and she loves imagination. Plus, she's so supersmart and nice that she deserves something clever. Sure, she'll like her mug and her

1. someone who works toward protecting the environment

2. Spanish for "Christmas"

almost-real earrings and her satin-dressed doll. But I've chosen something that is even better.

And there it is, still sitting there in the middle of the store-front window at Gone Bananas Shop.

[30] A Chia Pet.

* * *

Mami stares at me as I explain my idea.

I point to the picture in the flyer: a clay sheep covered in grassy hair.

"You put the chia seeds inside and water it, and it grows fur," I tell her. "Isn't it fantastic? We learned about germination³ last month."

She's just gotten home from the Queen for a Day Laundromat, where she works as an attendant. Some people come with Santa Claus-size bags of dirty clothes, but she doesn't mind. Mami is the only person I know who actually loves doing laundry. "You can see the results of your effort," Mami says. Plus, not speaking English isn't a problem. All you need to say are the days of the week, numbers, and *Have a good day*.

[35] She studies the flyer, scanning the words she doesn't understand. There's lint caught in the hinges of her glasses, and she smells pleasantly of detergent. Suddenly she frowns.

"¡Diez dólares!" Her eyes go wide. Ten dollars! "We can't go around buying people presents that cost ten dollars!"

"It's not just anybody, Mami. It's Mrs. Robertson!" I say. "She's my favorite *maestra*!"⁴

"Do the math, Maria Elisa — and don't use your fingers. If we buy even five people something like that, we'll be out our grocery money for a whole week. We can't go hungry!"

"Pero,"⁵ Mami!" I say, stumbling over my Spanish. My stomach is in a knot, and tears start to cloud my eyes. "A Chia Pet is perfect!"

[40] "Don't be ridiculous!" Mami says. She slips off her shoes and stretches her back. "Why would she want that grassy thing? She's not a cow, for heaven's sake! ¡Que locura!"

"It is *not* crazy!" I follow her to the kitchen, where she reaches under the sink for pots and pans

3. the process of a plant growing from a seed

4. Spanish for "teacher"

5. Spanish for "but"

to start dinner. "Mrs. Robertson loves science! Besides, everyone will give her a good present. It would be rude not to give her something. I'll be the only one who is empty-handed!"

She puts the pan on the burner, exasperated,⁶ and turns to me. "Who said you'd be empty-handed?"

I stop in my tracks, worried.

"I've already bought Mrs. Robertson a present," she continues. She opens the hall closet and pulls out a big plastic bag. "Your teacher is a working woman, like me." she fishes deep inside. "I know just... what... she needs."

[45] She finally pulls out what she's looking for and holds it out to me.

I blink, hoping it's a mirage.⁷

But no. It's real.

Mami is holding a packaged pair of pantyhose. The woman on the front is sitting half nude, her arms crossed over her chest. The price in the corner says \$1.49.

The room begins to spin. I imagine Mrs. Robertson opening this present in front of the class. I can already hear Charlene's laugh and the boys all ribbing one another.

[50] "No!" I cry.

"No?" Mami frowns. "What do you mean?"

"I can't give her that! It's all wrong!" Desperate, my tears start to flow. "That lady is naked, can't you see?"

"Don't overreact. She's covering herself modestly."

My voice is loud and my nose is running. "Mami," I shout. "This is the dumbest gift ever!"

[55] Mami's eyes become steely and dark. She doesn't like me to be fresh, and I can see that she's holding her back straight the way she always does when she's made a final decision.

"This is what we'll be giving her, *niña*."⁸ She hands over a tube of Christmas paper. "Now wrap

6. **Exasperated** (*adjective*) irritated and frustrated

7. a visual trick, in which a person thinks they see something that is not really there

8. Spanish for "girl"

it.”

* * *

“So, where’s your present?” Charlene asks me on Friday afternoon. We’re having our holiday party, but I’m not in the mood. “Don’t you have anything?” She narrows her eyes, waiting.

“It’s there, Charlene.” I give her an ugly look and bite the head off a candy cane reindeer.

I’m not lying, not technically. Mrs. Robertson’s desk is covered with carefully wrapped presents, but mine is actually on the floor beneath her desk near the trash can, where it belongs. I sneaked back to our classroom during lunch and lodged it there, hoping that she won’t see it.

[60] “You’re not fond of cupcakes, Maria Elisa?” Mrs. Robertson asks me. She’s walking around the room with a tray of delicious-looking cupcakes frosted in red and green.

“No thanks,” I say glumly. “I’m not very hungry.”

Charlene grabs the biggest one. “When are you going to open your presents, Mrs. Robertson?” she asks, pointing at the pile. “I want you to open mine first.”

I stare at the little lumps of glue that I’ve left drying inside my desk.

Mrs. Robertson glances at the clock. “Unfortunately, we won’t have time,” she says. “But I promise to open them at home.”

[65] I breathe a sigh of relief. This might be a real Christmas miracle. If I’m lucky, maybe the custodian will just sweep it away before she even knows it’s from me. That way she won’t think that I don’t like her or that I’m not clever enough to give her a good present she deserves.

I gather the new snowman erasers we got and keep my eyes on the clock, praying, for once, for a speedy dismissal. Mrs. Robertson has flashed the lights, and we’re all racing for our coats and backpacks, sugared up and excited for vacation.

The bell finally rings, and everyone cheers.

“Happy holidays, everyone!” Mrs. Robertson calls after us. The antlers she’s wearing look a little lopsided. “Enjoy your time off.”

I don’t look at her or say good-bye. Instead, I keep my eyes down and zoom past her, ashamed, as I make a break for the metal doors.

* * *

[70] I try my best to forget school during vacation.

I make snowmen with my downstairs neighbor, Sofia. I eat all the leftover turrónes from Abuela's *noche buena*⁹ dinner, even though Mami says those candies will rot my teeth. (What will she do then, I wonder darkly? Extract my teeth herself so we don't have to "waste money" at the dentist?) I watch cartoons and read and draw pictures with old markers on New Year's Eve, thinking about the day when I'm grown and can buy all the mood rings and Chia Pets I want.

But soon, it's time to go back to school. I zip myself up into my old coat and slide my feet into the fake-fur-lined snow boots that Mami gave me for Christmas, one size too big so they'll last. The whole six blocks to school, I worry about my dumb present all over again. Maybe Mrs. Robertson won't like me anymore. Or maybe she'll think I'm cheap or just a plain weirdo. All I can think about is that silly half-naked lady.

I walk along the hall toward our room. Everything is so shiny and new at school after the holidays. The floors are polished, the desktops have been scoured, and all the bulletin boards have fresh paper on them.

"We have new seats," Mrs. Robertson tells us.

[75] I breathe a sigh of relief. I'm at Table Two now, near the class library, far away from Charlene, who I'm happy to find out, had the chicken pox over the whole break.

When I start to unpack my things, I see a white envelope inside my empty desk. My name is written across the front in Mrs. Robertson's pretty script. I look over my shoulder to make sure no one is looking and open it slowly.

Dear Maria Elisa,

You were so kind to think of me at the holidays. How did you know that I always tear my stockings under the desk? It is so embarrassing! Thank you so much for finding an absolutely perfect gift for me. We can keep this our secret!

Your friend,

[80] *Mrs. Robertson*

I put the note inside my pocket and unpack my books. From under the desk, I check Mrs. Robertson's legs and smile. She's wearing pantyhose, and maybe they're the ones I gave her. Best of all, no one else knows. And just like that, my shame floats away, and everything inside of me feels stronger and new.

9. Spanish term referring to Christmas Eve night

*A Present for Mrs. Robertson by Meg Medina, originally published in *Been There, Done That: Writing Stories from Real Life* (Grosset & Dunlap, 2016).*

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Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. What is the main theme of the short story?
 - A. Gifts are personal and should be opened in private.
 - B. It is better to show you care with words rather than gifts.
 - C. The thought behind a gift is more important than the price.
 - D. It is normal to sometimes feel embarrassed by your parents.

2. How does paragraph 16 develop Mrs. Robertson's character?
 - A. It highlights how difficult it is to please Mrs. Robertson.
 - B. It highlights how much Mrs. Robertson cares about her students.
 - C. It suggests that Mrs. Robertson is looking forward to winter vacation.
 - D. It reveals that Mrs. Robertson treats her favorite students better than others.

3. What does it mean that Maria Elisa's "whole inside goes even warmer" in paragraph 19?
 - A. She is overheating in her puffy jacket.
 - B. She is excited for the start of winter vacation.
 - C. She is pleased by Mrs. Robertson's compliment.
 - D. She is embarrassed that Mrs. Robertson read her poem.

4. Which detail from the story best explains why Maria Elisa wants to give Mrs. Robertson a Chia Pet?
 - A. "But I've chosen something that is even better." (Paragraph 28)
 - B. "I point to the picture in the flyer: a clay sheep covered in grassy hair." (Paragraph 32)
 - C. "'We learned about germination last month.'" (Paragraph 33)
 - D. "'I'll be the only one who is empty-handed!'" (Paragraph 41)

5. How do Maria Elisa's and Mami's views on money compare?
 - A. Maria Elisa and Mami prefer saving money over spending it.
 - B. Maria Elisa and Mami enjoy spending money on useless things.
 - C. Maria Elisa wants to spend money on gifts, while Mami refuses to buy gifts for anyone.
 - D. Maria Elisa wants to spend money without worrying, while Mami dislikes wasting money.

6. How does Maria Elisa respond to the idea that she will have to give Mrs. Robertson pantyhose as a gift?
- A. She is horrified and does not want to give the gift to Mrs. Robertson.
 - B. She is angry with Mami and decides to buy Mrs. Robertson the Chia Pet anyway.
 - C. She is embarrassed because she already told her classmates she was buying a Chia Pet.
 - D. She is secretly relieved because she does not have to spend ten dollars on Mrs. Robertson.
7. How is Maria Elisa affected by Mrs. Robertson's note? (Paragraphs 77-81)
- A. She no longer feels embarrassed about her gift for Mrs. Robertson.
 - B. She is disappointed that Mrs. Robertson is keeping her gift a secret.
 - C. She is horrified to learn that Mrs. Robertson actually received her gift.
 - D. She no longer cares what her classmates think about her gift for Mrs. Robertson.
8. How does the narrator's point of view influence how the events are described in the passage?
- A. It highlights how important Christmas traditions are to the narrator.
 - B. It highlights how much the narrator wants to connect with her peers in class.
 - C. It highlights how difficult it is for the narrator to decide on a gift for Mrs. Robertson.
 - D. It highlights how important it is to the narrator to give Mrs. Robertson the right gift.
9. How does Mrs. Robertson's note to Maria Elisa develop the theme of the passage? (Paragraphs 77-80)

Discussion Questions

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

1. In the story, Mrs. Robertson is very grateful for Maria Elisa's gift and calls it the "perfect gift." Why do you think this is? If you could receive a perfect gift, what would it be? Describe it.
2. In the story, Maria Elisa wants to give Mrs. Robertson a Chia Pet for a present. Do you think Mrs. Robertson would have preferred a Chia Pet over pantyhose? Why or why not? Do you think the gift itself matters? Explain your answer.
3. Have you ever given someone a gift that you thought they would dislike, but they loved? Explain what happened. Why do you think they loved your gift?

PAIRED TEXT



Name: _____

Class: _____

Mother and Daughter

By Gary Soto

1990

Gary Soto is an American poet, novelist, and memoirist. In this short story, a young girl's mother doesn't have the money to buy her a new dress for a school dance. As you read, take notes on Yollie and her mother's interactions.

- [1] Yollie's mother, Mrs. Moreno, was a large woman who wore a muumuu¹ and butterOy-shaped glasses. She liked to water her lawn in the evening and wave at low-riders,² who would stare at her behind their smoky sunglasses and laugh. Now and then a low-rider from Belmont Avenue would make his car jump and shout "Mamacita!" But most of the time they just stared and wondered how she got so large.

Mrs. Moreno had a strange sense of humor. Once, Yollie and her mother were watching a late-night movie called They Came to Look. It was about creatures from the underworld who had climbed through molten³ lava to walk the earth. But Yollie, who had played soccer all day with the kids next door, was too tired to be scared. Her eyes closed but sprang open when her mother screamed, "Look, Yollie! Oh, you missed a scary part. The guy's face was all ugly!"



"Untitled" by reza shayestehpour is licensed under CC0.

But Yollie couldn't keep her eyes open. They fell shut again and stayed shut, even when her mother screamed and slammed a heavy palm on the arm of her chair.

"Mom, wake me up when the movie's over so I can go to bed," mumbled Yollie.

- [5] "OK, Yollie, I wake you," said her mother through a mouthful of popcorn.

But after the movie ended, instead of waking her daughter, Mrs. Moreno laughed under her breath, turned the TV and lights oM, and tiptoed to bed. Yollie woke up in the middle of the night and didn't know where she was. For a moment she thought she was dead. Maybe something from the underworld had lifted her from her house and carried her into the earth's belly. She blinked her sleepy eyes, looked around at the darkness, and called,

1. a woman's loose, brightly colored dress
2. a customized car that is closer to the ground
3. liqueNed by heat

"Mom? Mom, where are you?" But there was no answer, just the throbbing hum of the refrigerator.

Finally, Yollie's grogginess cleared and she realized her mother had gone to bed, leaving her on the couch. Another of her little jokes.

But Yollie wasn't laughing. She tiptoed into her mother's bedroom with a glass of water and set it on the nightstand next to the alarm clock. The next morning, Yollie woke to screams. When her mother reached to turn off the alarm, she had overturned the glass of water.

Yollie burned her mother's morning toast and gloated.⁴ "Ha! Ha! I got you back. Why did you leave me on the couch when I told you to wake me up?"

- [10] Despite their jokes, mother and daughter usually got along. They watched bargain matinees⁵ together, and played croquet in the summer and checkers in the winter. Mrs. Moreno encouraged Yollie to study hard because she wanted her daughter to be a doctor. She bought Yollie a desk, a typewriter, and a lamp that cut glare so her eyes would not grow tired from hours of studying.

Yollie was slender as a tulip, pretty, and one of the smartest kids at Saint Theresa's. She was captain of crossing guards, an altar girl,⁶ and a whiz in the school's monthly spelling bees.

"*Tienes que estudiar mucho*,"⁷ Mrs. Moreno said every time she propped her work-weary feet on the hassock.⁸ "You have to study a lot, then you can get a good job and take care of me."

"Yes, Mama," Yollie would respond, her face buried in a book. If she gave her mother any sympathy, she would begin her stories about how she had come with her family from Mexico with nothing on her back but a sack with three skirts, all of which were too large by the time she crossed the border because she had lost weight from not having enough to eat.

Everyone thought Yollie's mother was a riot.⁹ Even the nuns laughed at her antics.¹⁰ Her brother Raul, a nightclub owner, thought she was funny enough to go into show business.

- [15] But there was nothing funny about Yollie needing a new outfit for the eighth-grade fall dance. They couldn't afford one. It was late October, with Christmas around the corner, and their dented Chevy Nova had gobbled up almost one hundred dollars in repairs.

"We don't have the money," said her mother, genuinely sad because they couldn't buy the outfit, even though there was a little money stashed away for college. Mrs. Moreno remembered her teenage years and her hardworking parents, who picked grapes and oranges, and chopped beets and cotton for meager¹¹ pay around

-
4. **Gloat** (*verb*) to dwell on one's own success or another's misfortune
 5. a showing of a movie that takes place in the daytime
 6. a girl acting as an assistant in church services
 7. Spanish for "you have to study a lot"
 8. a firm cushion used as footstool
 9. **Riot** (*noun*) a highly amusing or entertaining person
 10. amusing behavior

Kerman. Those were the days when “new clothes” meant limp and out-of-style dresses from Saint Vincent de Paul.¹²

The best Mrs. Moreno could do was buy Yollie a pair of black shoes with velvet bows and fabric dye to color her white summer dress black.

“We can color your dress so it will look brand-new,” her mother said brightly, shaking the bottle of dye as she ran hot water into a plastic dish tub. She poured the black liquid into the tub and stirred it with a pencil. Then, slowly and carefully, she lowered the dress into the tub.

Yollie couldn’t stand to watch. She knew it wouldn’t work. It would be like the time her mother stirred up a batch of molasses for candy apples on Yollie’s birthday. She’d dipped the apples into the goo and swirled them and seemed to taunt Yollie by singing “*Las Mañanitas*”¹³ to her. When she was through, she set the apples on wax paper. They were hard as rocks and hurt the kids’ teeth. Finally, they had a contest to see who could break the apples open by throwing them against the side of the house. The apples shattered like grenades, sending the kids scurrying for cover, and in an odd way the birthday party turned out to be a success. At least everyone went home happy.

- [20] To Yollie’s surprise, the dress came out shiny black. It looked brand-new and sophisticated, like what people in New York wear. She beamed at her mother, who hugged Yollie and said, “See, what did I tell you?”

The dance was important to Yollie because she was in love with Ernie Castillo, the third-best speller in the class. She bathed, dressed, did her hair and nails, and primped until her mother yelled, “All right already.” Yollie sprayed her neck and wrists with Mrs. Moreno’s Avon perfume and bounced into the car.

Mrs. Moreno let Yollie out in front of the school. She waved and told her to have a good time but behave herself, then roared off, blue smoke trailing from the tail pipe of the old Nova.

Yollie ran into her best friend, Janice. They didn’t say it, but each thought the other was the most beautiful girl at the dance; the boys would fall over themselves asking them to dance.

The evening was warm but thick with clouds. Gusts of wind picked up the paper lanterns hanging in the trees and swung them, blurring the night with reds and yellows. The lanterns made the evening seem romantic, like a scene from a movie. Everyone danced, sipped punch, and stood in knots of threes and fours, talking. Sister Kelly got up and jitterbugged with some kid’s father. When the record ended, students broke into applause.

- [25] Janice had her eye on Frankie Ledesma, and Yollie, who kept smoothing her dress down when the wind picked up, had her eye on Ernie. It turned out that Ernie had his mind on Yollie, too. He ate a handful of cookies nervously, then asked her for a dance.

“Sure,” she said, nearly throwing herself into his arms. They danced two fast ones before they got a slow one. As

11. **Meager** (*adjective*) lacking in quantity or quality

12. a thrift store

13. a traditional Mexican birthday song sung in Mexico and other Latin American countries at birthday parties

they circled under the lanterns, rain began falling, lightly at first. Yollie loved the sound of the raindrops ticking against the leaves. She leaned her head on Ernie's shoulder, though his sweater was scratchy. He felt warm and tender. Yollie could tell that he was in love, and with her, of course. The dance continued successfully, romantically, until it began to pour.

"Everyone, let's go inside — and, boys, carry in the table and the record player," Sister Kelly commanded.

The girls and boys raced into the cafeteria. Inside, the girls, drenched to the bone, hurried to the restrooms to brush their hair and dry themselves. One girl cried because her velvet dress was ruined. Yollie felt sorry for her and helped her dry the dress off with paper towels, but it was no use. The dress was ruined.

Yollie went to a mirror. She looked a little gray now that her mother's makeup had washed away but not as bad as some of the other girls. She combed her damp hair, careful not to pull too hard. She couldn't wait to get back to Ernie. Yollie bent over to pick up a bobby pin, and shame spread across her face. A black puddle was forming at her feet. Drip, black drip. Drip, black drip. The dye was falling from her dress like black tears. Yollie stood up. Her dress was now the color of ash. She looked around the room. The other girls, unaware of Yollie's problem, were busy grooming themselves. What could she do? Everyone would laugh. They would know she dyed an old dress because she couldn't afford a new one. She hurried from the restroom with her head down, across the cafeteria floor and out the door. She raced through the storm, crying as the rain mixed with her tears and ran into twig-choked gutters.

[30] When she arrived home, her mother was on the couch eating cookies and watching TV.

"How was the dance, *m'ija*?¹⁴ Come watch the show with me. It's really good."

Yollie stomped, head down, to her bedroom. She undressed and threw the dress on the floor.

Her mother came into the room. "What's going on? What's all the racket, baby?"

"The dress. It's cheap! It's no good!" Yollie kicked the dress at her mother and watched it land in her hands. Mrs. Moreno studied it closely but couldn't see what was wrong. "What's the matter? It's just a bit wet."

[35] "The dye came out, that's what." Mrs. Moreno looked at her hands and saw the grayish dye puddling in the shallow lines of her palms. Poor baby, she thought, her brow darkening as she made a sad face.

She wanted to tell her daughter how sorry she was, but she knew it wouldn't help. She walked back to the living room and cried.

The next morning, mother and daughter stayed away from each other. Yollie sat in her room turning the pages of an old Seventeen, while her mother watered her plants with a Pepsi bottle.

"Drink, my children," she said loud enough for Yollie to hear. She let the water slurp into pots of coleus¹⁵ and

14. Spanish for "my daughter"

15. a tropical plant with brightly colored leaves

cacti. "Water is all you need. My daughter needs clothes, but I don't have no money."

Yollie tossed her *Seventeen* on her bed. She was embarrassed at last night's tirade.¹⁶ It wasn't her mother's fault that they were poor.

- [40] When they sat down together for lunch, they felt awkward about the night before. But Mrs. Moreno had made a fresh stack of tortillas and cooked up a pan of *chile verde*,¹⁷ and that broke the ice. She licked her thumb and smacked her lips.

"You know, honey, we gotta figure a way to make money," Yollie's mother said. "You and me. We don't have to be poor. Remember the Garcias. They made this stupid little tool that fixes cars. They moved away because they're rich. That's why we don't see them no more."

"What can we make?" asked Yollie. She took another tortilla and tore it in half.

"Maybe a screwdriver that works on both ends? Something like that." The mother looked around the room for ideas, but then shrugged. "Let's forget it. It's better to get an education. If you get a good job and have spare time then maybe you can invent something." She rolled her tongue over her lips and cleared her throat. "The county fair hires people. We can get a job there. It will be here next week."

Yollie hated the idea. What would Ernie say if he saw her pitching hay at the cows? How could she go to school smelling like an armful of chickens? "No, they wouldn't hire us," she said.

- [45] The phone rang. Yollie lurched from her chair to answer it, thinking it would be Janice wanting to know why she had left. But it was Ernie wondering the same thing. When he found out she wasn't mad at him, he asked if she would like to go to a movie.

"I'll ask," Yollie said, smiling. She covered the phone with her hand and counted to ten. She uncovered the receiver and said, "My mom says it's OK. What are we going to see?"

After Yollie hung up, her mother climbed, grunting, onto a chair to reach the top shelf in the hall closet. She wondered why she hadn't done it earlier. She reached behind a stack of towels and pushed her chubby hand into the cigar box where she kept her secret stash of money.

"I've been saving a little money every month," said Mrs. Moreno. "For you, *m'ija*." Her mother held up five twenties, a blossom of green that smelled sweeter than flowers on that Saturday. They drove to Macy's and bought a blouse, shoes, and a skirt that would not bleed in rain or any other kind of weather.

"Mother and Daughter" from In Baseball in April and Other Stories ©1990 by Gary Soto. Reprinted with permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

16. **Tirade** (*noun*) a long, angry speech of criticism or accusation

17. Spanish for "green chili"

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. PART A: How does the plot develop the theme of the story?
 - A. Yollie's embarrassment at the dance makes her believe that money can provide happiness.
 - B. Despite the unfortunate events at the dance, Yollie realizes that her mother does her best to make her happy.
 - C. When Yollie is unable to buy the things she wants, she understands the importance of finding a good job.
 - D. After Yollie dances with Ernie, she realizes that he doesn't care how expensive her clothes are.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "But there was nothing funny about Yollie needing a new outfit for the eighth-grade fall dance. They couldn't afford one." (Paragraph 15)
 - B. "Yollie could tell that he was in love, and with her, of course. The dance continued successfully, romantically, until it began to pour." (Paragraph 26)
 - C. "Yollie tossed her Seventeen on her bed. She was embarrassed at last night's tirade. It wasn't her mother's fault that they were poor." (Paragraph 39)
 - D. "'Let's forget it. It's better to get an education. If you get a good job and have spare time then maybe you can invent something.'" (Paragraph 43)

3. PART A: How does Mrs. Moreno's view of money change by the end of the story?
 - A. She is willing to spend money as long as it makes Yollie happy.
 - B. She plans to save her money better in the future.
 - C. She wants Yollie to work for her money.
 - D. She thinks her money should be used for Yollie's future.

4. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "her mother, genuinely sad because they couldn't buy the outfit, even though there was a little money stashed away for college." (Paragraph 16)
 - B. "'Water is all you need. My daughter needs clothes, but I don't have no money.'" (Paragraph 38)
 - C. "'The county fair hires people. We can get a job there. It will be here next week.'" (Paragraph 43)
 - D. "'I've been saving a little money every month,' said Mrs. Moreno. 'For you, m'ija.'" (Paragraph 48)

5. Re-read the sentence "[t]he dye was falling from her dress like black tears" in paragraph 29. How does the simile contribute to the tone of the story?

Discussion Questions

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

1. In the context of the story, does money buy happiness? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
2. In the context of the story, what makes a family? How does Mrs. Moreno show Yollie that she cares about her? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the story, what are the effects of social status? What does being poor mean to Yollie and her mother? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

ANSWER KEYS



Answer key > A Present for Mrs. Robertson

by Meg Medina ● 2016

1. What is the main theme of the short story?

6.RL.KID.2 ^

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary.

- A. Gifts are personal and should be opened in private.
- B. It is better to show you care with words rather than gifts.
- C. The thought behind a gift is more important than the price.**
- D. It is normal to sometimes feel embarrassed by your parents.

2. How does paragraph 16 develop Mrs. Robertson's character?

6.RL.CS.5 ^

Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

- A. It highlights how difficult it is to please Mrs. Robertson.
- B. It highlights how much Mrs. Robertson cares about her students.**
- C. It suggests that Mrs. Robertson is looking forward to winter vacation.
- D. It reveals that Mrs. Robertson treats her favorite students better than others.

3. What does it mean that Maria Elisa's "whole inside goes even warmer" in paragraph 19?

6.RL.CS.4 ^

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including allusions to other texts.

- A. She is overheating in her puffy jacket.
- B. She is excited for the start of winter vacation.

C. She is pleased by Mrs. Robertson's compliment.

D. She is embarrassed that Mrs. Robertson read her poem.

4. Which detail from the story best explains why Maria Elisa wants to give Mrs. Robertson a Chia Pet? **6.RL.KID.1** ^

Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw logical inferences; cite textual evidence to support conclusions.

A. "But I've chosen something that is even better." (Paragraph 28)

B. "I point to the picture in the flyer: a clay sheep covered in grassy hair." (Paragraph 32)

C. "We learned about germination last month." (Paragraph 33)

D. "I'll be the only one who is empty-handed!" (Paragraph 41)

5. How do Maria Elisa's and Mami's views on money compare? **6.RL.KID.3** ^

Describe how the plot of a story or drama unfolds, as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

A. Maria Elisa and Mami prefer saving money over spending it.

B. Maria Elisa and Mami enjoy spending money on useless things.

C. Maria Elisa wants to spend money on gifts, while Mami refuses to buy gifts for anyone.

D. Maria Elisa wants to spend money without worrying, while Mami dislikes wasting money.

6. How does Maria Elisa respond to the idea that she will have to give Mrs. Robertson pantyhose as a gift? **6.RL.KID.3** ^

Describe how the plot of a story or drama unfolds, as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

A. She is horrified and does not want to give the gift to Mrs. Robertson.

B. She is angry with Mami and decides to buy Mrs. Robertson the Chia Pet anyway.

C. She is embarrassed because she already told her classmates she was buying a Chia Pet.

- D. She is secretly relieved because she does not have to spend ten dollars on Mrs. Robertson.

7. How is Maria Elisa affected by Mrs. Robertson's note? (Paragraphs 77-81) **6.RL.KID.3** ^

Describe how the plot of a story or drama unfolds, as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

- A. She no longer feels embarrassed about her gift for Mrs. Robertson.**
B. She is disappointed that Mrs. Robertson is keeping her gift a secret.
C. She is horrified to learn that Mrs. Robertson actually received her gift.
D. She no longer cares what her classmates think about her gift for Mrs. Robertson.

8. How does the narrator's point of view influence how the events are described in the passage? **6.RL.CS.6** ^

Explain how an author establishes and conveys the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

- A. It highlights how important Christmas traditions are to the narrator.
B. It highlights how much the narrator wants to connect with her peers in class.
C. It highlights how difficult it is for the narrator to decide on a gift for Mrs. Robertson.
D. It highlights how important it is to the narrator to give Mrs. Robertson the right gift.

9. How does Mrs. Robertson's note to Maria Elisa develop the theme of the passage? (Paragraphs 77-80) **6.RL.CS.5** ^

Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

Student answers will vary. In Mrs. Roberson's note to Maria Elisa, Mrs. Robertson emphasizes how grateful she is for Maria Elisa's thoughtfulness and gift. Mrs. Robertson writes to Maria Elisa, "You were so kind to think of me at the holidays." Mrs. Robertson claims that the gift is "perfect" because she tears her stockings under her desk. This supports the idea that a gift's value is not just based on how much it cost. Additionally, Mrs. Robertson is moved that Maria Elisa thought of her during the holidays. In the end, it may not have mattered what Maria Elisa gave to

Mrs. Robertson — Chia Pet or pantyhose — Mrs. Robertson would be grateful for Maria Elisa's thoughtfulness, regardless of the gift.

Answer key > Mother and Daughter

by Gary Soto ● 1990

1. PART A: How does the plot develop the theme of the story?

6.RL.KID.2 ^

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary.

- A. Yollie's embarrassment at the dance makes her believe that money can provide happiness.
- B. Despite the unfortunate events at the dance, Yollie realizes that her mother does her best to make her happy.**
- C. When Yollie is unable to buy the things she wants, she understands the importance of finding a good job.
- D. After Yollie dances with Ernie, she realizes that he doesn't care how expensive her clothes are.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?

6.RL.KID.1 ^

Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw logical inferences; cite textual evidence to support conclusions.

- A. "But there was nothing funny about Yollie needing a new outfit for the eighth-grade fall dance. They couldn't afford one." (Paragraph 15)
- B. "Yollie could tell that he was in love, and with her, of course. The dance continued successfully, romantically, until it began to pour." (Paragraph 26)
- C. "Yollie tossed her Seventeen on her bed. She was embarrassed at last night's tirade. It wasn't her mother's fault that they were poor." (Paragraph 39)**
- D. "'Let's forget it. It's better to get an education. If you get a good job and have spare time then maybe you can invent something.'" (Paragraph 43)

3. PART A: How does Mrs. Moreno's view of money change by the end of the story? **6.RL.KID.3** ^

Describe how the plot of a story or drama unfolds, as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

- A. She is willing to spend money as long as it makes Yollie happy.**
- B. She plans to save her money better in the future.
- C. She wants Yollie to work for her money.
- D. She thinks her money should be used for Yollie's future.

4. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? **6.RL.KID.1** ^

Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw logical inferences; cite textual evidence to support conclusions.

- A. "her mother, genuinely sad because they couldn't buy the outfit, even though there was a little money stashed away for college." (Paragraph 16)
- B. "'Water is all you need. My daughter needs clothes, but I don't have no money.'" (Paragraph 38)
- C. "'The county fair hires people. We can get a job there. It will be here next week.'" (Paragraph 43)
- D. "'I've been saving a little money every month,' said Mrs. Moreno. 'For you, m'ija.'"** (Paragraph 48)

5. Re-read the sentence "[t]he dye was falling from her dress like black tears" in paragraph 29. How does the simile contribute to the tone of the story? **6.RL.CS.4** ^

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including allusions to other texts.

Answers will vary; students should explain how the describing the dye as "falling" like tears emphasizes the sad and disappointed tone of this section. Yollie is not only sad that her dress is ruined, but is embarrassed by what other kids will think when they realize she couldn't afford a new dress and had to dye an old one. The simile also points to the literal tears that Yollie sheds later on in the paragraph, when she feels it necessary to flee the dance.