

Blueprint for Reading



the Author

D. H. Lawrence
(1885-1979)

David Herbert Richard Lawrence was born in Eastwood in Nottinghamshire, England. After studying at University College, Nottingham, he became a teacher, but left to write having achieved a mild success with his first novel *The White Peacock* (1911). He married Frieda Weekley in 1914 and lived in Italy, Australia, and Mexico before returning to England, eventually dying of tuberculosis. Besides short stories and novels, Lawrence wrote poetry and essays, all quite different from the usual polite English offerings. Referring to his writing, Lawrence said, "Whoever reads me will be in the thick of the scrimmage, and if he doesn't like it—if he wants a safe seat in the audience—let him read someone else."

Background Bytes

To some extent, writing is always autobiographical. All experiences, beliefs, and positions leave traces. If the author insists on using himself as raw material, the reader will not have to look far for him.

David Herbert (D. H.) Lawrence wrote about what he knew and left his imprint throughout his work. He grew up in the coal-mining town of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire, England, the fourth child of an illiterate miner and an educated mother. At the turn of the century, Lawrence's father and other laborers walked through beautiful fields to gritty jobs in the mines. Many of Lawrence's works, including *Adolf*, explore the contrast between the mining town and the unspoiled countryside, examining the life and culture of the miners.

D. H. Lawrence knew the area, drawing on his own childhood experiences to great effect. He was fascinated by the gap between the green world and the grime of the mines, the weary routine of labor set against the freedom of wild creatures. The result is seen in *Adolf*, as Lawrence explores the conflict between man and nature. The conflict is obvious as the domesticated mother tries to control wildness—the rabbit, home disorder, children. A powerful short story is created, staying with the reader long after it is put down.

Into "Adolph"

Have you ever written about a holiday, a school event, or a childhood episode? The result was probably a **vignette** (pronounced *vin-yet*), a sharply focused piece of nonfiction prose. Had you changed names, altered events for greater impact, and included the literary components of **theme** and **conflict**, you would have a short story.

Adolf is, essentially, a vignette from Lawrence's childhood. How does he end the story? Note the narrator's reaction to the rabbit in the last paragraph. Do you want to return to the story and re-examine the author's theme? Now, think about the vignette from your childhood. If it were a story, how would you achieve maximum reader impact?

Focusing on Conflict as Theme

Normally, conflict serves to bring out theme. In *Adolf*, the conflicts *are* the theme. The story is, essentially a study of conflict. All three conflicts in literature are present in *Adolf*—**man vs. nature**, **man vs. man**, and **man vs. self**.

- ✦ Man vs. nature: a family tries to tame a wild animal that won't be tamed.
- ✦ Man vs. man: Mother argues with her family about keeping the creature.
- ✦ Man vs. self: the narrator must work to control emotions that can't be returned by "the wild and loveless" rabbit.

The sharp contrasts between **man and nature** cause the conflicts. Nature is pure and free; Father is dirty from the mine and tired. He feels compassion for Adolf and hopes he can survive indoors; Mother doesn't want the wild creature in her house. The narrator is drawn to Adolf but fights not to love him.

The conflicts are rooted in **character**. Sensible Mother lives by convention; animals may not eat at the table! Father, as unpredictable as Adolf, returns home soiled and weary at dawn, sips tea from a saucer like a cat, uses his forearm as a napkin, and grunts his comments.

The theme is a serious one, but Lawrence keeps a light tone. The rabbit is amusing, causing disorder yet fleeing the uproar. At first indifferent to the family, he becomes a nuisance, kicking and scratching the children. At story's end, conflict is usually resolved. Does that happen here? What lingers?

Word Bank

Enigmatically: What does it mean, to speak **enigmatically**? Do you know what an **enigma** is? An **enigma** is a puzzle or a riddle, and has come to mean a puzzling or contradictory situation or person. In both ancient Greece and Rome, the word meant to **speak darkly** or in **riddles**. Another word in the story, **obscure**, "not clear or plain, vague, indistinct," is also related to the absence of light. The Latin **obscurus** meant "dark." The word **oblivious**, "unmindful or unaware; without remembrance of memory," describes a state of mind in which there is a spiritual or psychological loss of light.

affronted	deluged	insolent	pensively
cajoling	elongation	oblivious	rend
circumvent	enigmatically	obscure	
clamor	extricated	palpitated	

GETTING STARTED

Read aloud the following passages twice, telling students to listen carefully. They will be asked questions, but will not be graded.

"When we were children our father often worked on the night-shift. Once it was spring-time, and he used to arrive home, black and tired, just as we were downstairs in our night-dresses. Then night met morning face to face, and the contact was not always happy. Perhaps it was painful to my father to see us gaily entering upon the day into which he dragged himself soiled and weary. He didn't like going to bed in the spring morning sunshine.

But sometimes he was happy, because of his long walks through the dewy fields in the first daybreak. He loved the open morning, the crystal and the space, after a night down pit. He watched every bird, every stir in the trembling grass, answered the whinnying of the peewits and tweeted to the wrens. If he could, he also would have whinnied and tweeted and whistled in a native language that was not human. He liked non-human things best."

Ask students the following multiple-choice questions:

1. On what shift did the narrator's father work?
a. First shift b. Second shift c. Night shift (correct answer)
2. Why was Father unhappy when he saw his children in the morning?
a. The children made fun of their father's soiled, weary appearance.
b. It was difficult seeing his children start a fresh new day while he was going to bed. (correct answer)
c. Father was ashamed of the type of work he did.
3. Why was Father happy sometimes?
a. He knew a comfortable bed awaited him.
b. His morning walk home had lifted his spirits. (correct answer)
c. His children were there to welcome him.
4. Why did he love the open morning so?
a. It was welcome after a night down pit. (correct answer)
b. It distracted him on the walk home.
c. It was a break from the crowded city he lived in.
5. What did he enjoy doing as he walked?
a. He enjoyed singing old songs about men at work.
b. He enjoyed watching rabbits scurrying through the grass.
c. He enjoyed imitating bird-songs. (correct answer)
6. What did Father enjoy best?
a. Father enjoyed his fishing breaks best.
b. Father enjoyed non-human things best. (correct answer)
c. Father most enjoyed whinnying to the horses in the next field.

BACKGROUND BYTES

Author biography is not usually considered background to a story, unless you are reading D.H. Lawrence. Then biography is *almost* everything. If we don't consider his life, we mis-read his work. The man is everywhere in the work.

David Herbert (D.H.) Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, England, in 1885, the fourth child of an unlikely marriage—an illiterate coal miner and an educated woman. With his mother as mentor, Lawrence enjoyed books and poetry, making him somewhat of an outcast in the coal-mining town.

Lawrence left school at 16 for a clerk's job in a surgical appliance factory but was forced to stop after a bout of pneumonia. With almost no formal training, he taught in Eastwood in 1902 and began to write in 1905, seeing his first story published in a local newspaper in 1907. He attended University College, Nottingham, from 1906 to 1908, eventually earning a teacher's certificate, while writing poems and stories, and starting his first novel.

In 1911, Lawrence again fell ill with pneumonia. Now he decided to stop teaching and live as a writer. After World War I, Lawrence left England for Italy, never to return. He wrote fluently—short stories, poems, plays, essays, travel books, and the novels that made him famous. He died in France on March 2nd, 1930. His birthplace at 8a Victoria Street is now a museum. Quite fitting, as critics consider him among the finest of 20th century English stylists.

INTO "ADOLF"

Anyone can write of childhood; it takes talent to turn memory into art. In *Adolf*, Lawrence draws a vivid word picture of his family and the mining town of Eastwood. He was fascinated that mines and nature could exist side-by-side in uneasy balance—the bleakness of the mines against the freedom of wild creatures. From his childhood, Lawrence took the mines and miners, adding elements of theme and conflict to hone a work of fiction. This unlikely balance—between man and nature, between tame and wild things—is the theme of the story. In *Adolf*, Lawrence writes of wild things that cannot be tamed—the rabbit and nature, especially—all arrayed against the determined domesticity of the mother.

FOCUSING ON CONFLICT AS THEME

By its very nature, fiction must have conflict, a problem to be overcome or a situation to be accepted. Conflict drives the story and keeps the reader involved. In literature there are three main conflicts: man vs. nature, man vs. man, and man vs. self. In *Adolf*, all three themes converge. Man vs. nature: A family attempts to tame a wild animal that will not be tamed. Man vs. man: Mother argues with her family about keeping the creature. Man vs. self: The narrator must work to keep his emotions in check, lest he care about "the wild and loveless" rabbit.

Each type of conflict is vividly portrayed. Nature in stark contrast. Nature is pure and free while Father is dirty from the mines and always weary. Father feels compassion toward Adolf and trusts he will survive, while Mother is fatalistic about his chances of survival. The narrator is drawn toward Adolf but fights not to love him.

In the end, the conflicts between man and nature and man vs. self are overcome; Adolf is returned to the wild, and no one's heart is broken. There is peace again in the home. Or is there? It is implied in the story that some conflict remains. Mother, relieved to be rid of Adolf, "...pooh-poohed the extravagant idea" that other wild creatures might reject their rabbit. Father, however, is still concerned for Adolf and "kept an eye open for him." Their squabbles regarding Adolf's well-being may not be over yet, and Father's own dark nature will still conflict with Mother's refinement.

Characterization, best seen in dialogue, drives the conflicts. Mother is sensible, bound by convention—animals shouldn't eat at the table! By contrast, Father is as abrupt and unpredictable as Adolf. He is a night creature, a shadow in their lives. Like Adolf, he is not of their world, arriving home at dawn, soiled and weary. He sips tea from a saucer like a cat, uses his forearm as a napkin, and leans more to grunting than speech.

While the theme of *Adolf* is serious, Lawrence maintains a light tone, turning the rabbit into an amusing but indifferent creature. Adolf creates mayhem in the house but is oblivious to the uproar caused. At first wary of humans, he becomes a danger, kicking and scratching those who would care for him. As the narrator tries to imagine a fitting end to their shared life, Adolf turns insolently away from the tame world.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

● The children's normal, cheery world is set against the father's depressing night shift, in the coal mines.

● Father comes home every morning, dirty and tired, as the children prepare for school.

● Father loves the openness of nature after a night in the mine. He would watch the birds and whistle in response to their songs.

● Father comes home one morning and the children are uneasy at his mood. He has something to say. Mother gives him tea.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

- ▶ **1. Setting the Stage:** The weary father is set against the lighthearted children.
- ▶ **2. Characterization:** Father is portrayed as a creature of the wild.
- ▶ **3. Characterization/Mood:** Father brings with him a sense of foreboding.



1

When we were children our father often worked on the night-shift. Once it was spring-time, and he used to arrive home, black and tired, just as we were downstairs in our nightdresses. Then night met morning face to face, and the contact was not always happy. Perhaps it was painful to my father to see us gaily entering upon the day into which he dragged himself soiled and weary. He didn't like going to bed in the spring morning sunshine.

2

But sometimes he was happy, because of his long walk through the dewy fields in the first daybreak. He loved the open morning, the crystal and the space, after a night down pit.¹ He watched every bird, every stir in the trembling grass, answered the whinnying of the peewits² and tweeted to the wrens. If he could, he also would have whinnied and tweeted and whistled in a native language that was not human.

He liked non-human things best.

One sunny morning we were all sitting at table when we heard his heavy slurring walk up the entry. We became uneasy. His presence was always trammelling.³ He passed the window darkly, and we heard him go into the scullery⁴ and put down his tin bottle. But directly he came into the kitchen. We felt at once that he had something to communicate. No one spoke. We watched his black face for a second.

"Give me a drink," he said.

My mother hastily poured out his tea.

1. A night *down pit* is a night spent working in the coal mines.

2. A *peewit* (PEE wit) is any of various birds with a high, shrill cry, such as the lapwing.

3. *Trammeling* (TRAM uh ling) refers to the father's presence restraining the children from doing as they pleased.

4. A *scullery* (SKULL er ee) is a small room off a kitchen where food is prepared and utensils are cleaned and stored.

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GUIDING THE READING

LITERAL

Q. What shift does Father work?

A. The night shift.

Q. What brought some joy to Father as he walked home?

A. The dewy fields at dawn. There he watched birds and whistled in response to their calls.

ANALYTICAL

Q. Why does the narrator begin by saying Father worked the night shift?

A. This is a story of contrasts. Father returns soiled and weary, to see the happy faces of his children.

Q. Why does the narrator feel it is painful for Father to see his children?

A. Dirty and tired, Father arrives home only to see his children leave joyfully for school on cheery spring mornings, while he has to go to

sleep "in the spring morning sunshine."

Q. How does the narrator convey the family's uneasiness one particular day when Father arrives home?

A. The family notes "his heavy slurring walk up the entry." We see "[Father] was always a disturbing presence," and "he passed the window darkly."

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Father suddenly puts a tiny brown rabbit on the table.
- Father says he found it with its dead mother and three dead little rabbits.

- Mother is angry that Father brought the wild animal home. The children protest, saying it would die without their help.
- Mother says the children will be upset when the animal dies.

- Mother knows it will not survive, reminding Father “we had it all before.”
- Father says wild animals don’t always die; Mother reminds him of other wild animals that “refused to live,” bringing “tears and trouble” into the house.
- Mother demands they take the rabbit to the field, but she is ignored.

4

He went to pour it out into his saucer. But instead of drinking he suddenly put something on the table among the teacups. A tiny brown rabbit! A small rabbit, a mere morsel, sitting against the bread as still as if it were a made thing.

5

“A rabbit! A young one! Who gave it to you, Father?”

But he laughed enigmatically, with a sliding motion of his yellow-grey eyes, and went to take off his coat. We pounced on the rabbit.

“Is it alive? Can you feel its heart beat?”

My father came back and sat down heavily in his armchair. He dragged his saucer to him, and blew his tea, pushing out his red lips under his black moustache.

“Where did you get it, Father?”

“I picked it up,” he said, wiping his forearm over his mouth and beard.

“Where?”

“It is a wild one!” came my mother’s quick voice.

“Yes it is.”

“Then why did you bring it?” cried my mother.

“Oh, we wanted it,” came our cry.

“Yes, I’ve no doubt you did—” retorted my mother. But she was drowned in our clamor of questions.

On the field path my father had found a dead mother rabbit and three dead little ones—this one alive, but unmoving.

“But what had killed them, Daddy?”

“I couldn’t say, my child. I s’d think she’d aten something.”⁵

“Why did you bring it!” again my mother’s voice of condemnation. “You know what it will be.”

My father made no answer, but we were loud in protest.

“He must bring it. It’s not big enough to live by itself. It would die,” we shouted.

“Yes, and it will die now. And then there’ll be *another* outcry.”

My mother set her face against the tragedy of dead pets. Our hearts sank.

“It won’t die, Father, will it? Why will it? It won’t.”

“I s’d think not,” said my father.

“You know well enough it will. Haven’t we had it all before!” said my mother.

“They dunna always pine,”⁶ replied my father testily.

But my mother reminded him of other little wild animals he had brought, which had sulked and refused to live, and brought storms of tears and trouble in our house of lunatics.⁷

Trouble fell on us. The little rabbit sat on our lap, unmoving, its eye wide and dark. We brought it milk, warm milk, and held it to its nose. It sat still as if it was far away, retreated down some deep burrow, hidden, oblivious. We wetted its mouth and whiskers with drops of milk. It gave no sign, did not even shake off the wet white drops. Somebody began to shed a few secret tears.

“What did I say?” cried my mother.

“Take it and put it down in the field.”

Her command was in vain. We were driven to get dressed for school. There sat

5. “I s’d think she’d aten something”: I should think she would have eaten something.

6. “They dunna always pine”: They don’t always waste away with hunger, grief and homesickness.

7. A *lunatic* (LOON uh tik) is a person acting crazy-like.

7

6

Word Bank

enigmatically (EN ig MAT ih klee) *adv.*: perplexingly; mysteriously
clamor (KLAM er) *n.*: a loud uproar, as from a crowd of people
oblivious (uh BLIV ee us) *adj.*: unmindful or unaware

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LITERARY COMPONENTS

- ▶ **4. Visual Imagery:** The size and stillness of the rabbit are shown.
- ▶ **5. Visual Imagery:** Again Father is seen not fitting into this ‘tame’ scene.
- ▶ **6. Dialogue/Characterization/Setting the Stage for Conflict:** Mother feels threatened by this wild visitor.
- ▶ **7. Conflict:** Mother tries to remove the source of conflict from her home.

ANALYTICAL

Q. How do we see that Father is ill at ease in the civilized domesticity of his own home?

A. Father sits heavily in a chair, pours tea into a saucer, instead of drinking from the cup. He then wipes his forearm over his mouth and beard.

Q. When Mother says “You know what it will be,” what does she mean?

A. She refers to other animals brought into the house that had died.

Q. What is meant by “...set her face against the tragedy of dead pets”?

A. Mother didn’t want her family to become attached to another wild animal, only to have them mourn over its death.

Q. Why did a sibling begin to cry when the rabbit refused to eat?

A. The child was afraid Mother was right.

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GUIDING THE READING

LITERAL

Q. What does Father put on the table one morning?

A. A tiny brown rabbit.

Q. Where did Father find the rabbit?

A. He picked it up on the field path on his way home.

Q. What is Mother’s reaction?

A. She is upset that Father brought the wild animal home.

Q. How do the children respond?

A. They say the rabbit will die without their help.

Q. How do both parents respond to the possible death of the rabbit?

A. Father says it won’t die. Mother is certain it will not survive.

Q. What happens when they try to feed the rabbit?

A. The rabbit does not even try the milk they give it.

Q. What happens when Mother demands the rabbit be taken back?

A. No one obeys.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Next day the rabbit sits motionless. Mother says it preferred to “sulk its life away.”
- The children are tearful. Mother is angry. Father has brought it home.

- The children place saucers on the floor should the animal decide to eat.
- Next morning, the narrator sees milk on the floor. The rabbit has eaten.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

- ▶ **8. Simile:** The rabbit is there but trying to stay out of sight.
- ▶ **9. Extended Metaphor/Theme:** The rabbit’s wildness and the children’s love cannot be joined.
- ▶ **10. Oxymoron:** The wild animal is unable to help itself stay alive.
- ▶ **11. Dialogue:** Mother shows her disdain but also her own guarded feelings.
- ▶ **12. Foreshadowing:** The rabbit is still alive, poised to enter their lives.

8

the rabbit. It was like a tiny obscure cloud. Watching it, our emotions died. Useless to love it, to yearn over it. A little wild thing, it became more mute and still, when we approached with love. We must not love it. We must circumvent it, for its own existence.

So I passed the order to my sister and my mother. The rabbit was not to be spoken to, nor even looked at. Wrapping it in a piece of flannel I put it in an obscure corner of the cold parlor, and put a saucer of milk before its nose. My mother was forbidden to enter the parlor while we were at school.

“As if I should take any notice of your nonsense,” she cried affronted. Yet I doubt if she ventured into the parlor.

At midday, after school, creeping into the front room, there we saw the rabbit still and unmoving in the piece of flannel.

Strange grey-brown neutralization of life, still living! It was a sore problem to us.

“Why won’t it drink its milk, Mother?”

we whispered. Our father was asleep.

“It prefers to sulk its life away, silly little thing.” A profound problem. Prefers to sulk its life away! We put young dandelion leaves to its nose. The sphinx⁸ was not more oblivious. Yet its eye was bright.

At tea-time, however, it had hopped a few inches, out of its flannel, and there it sat again, uncovered, a little solid cloud of muteness, brown, with unmoving whiskers. Only its side palpitated slightly with life.

Darkness came; my father set off to work. The rabbit was still unmoving. Dumb despair was coming over the sisters,

10

11

12

a threat of tears came before bed-time. Clouds of my mother’s anger gathered as she muttered against my father’s wantonness⁹.

Once more the rabbit was wrapped in the old pit-singlet¹⁰. But now it was carried into the scullery and put under the copper fire-place, that it might imagine itself inside a burrow. The saucers were placed about, four or five, here and there on the floor, so that if the little creature *should* chance to hop abroad, it could not fail to come upon some food. After this my mother was allowed to take from the scullery what she wanted and then she was forbidden to open the door.

When morning came and it was light, I went downstairs. Opening the scullery door, I heard a slight scuffle. Then I saw dabbles of milk all over the floor and tiny rabbit droppings in the saucers. And there the miscreant,¹¹ the tips of his ears showing behind a pair of boots. I peeped at him. He sat bright-eyed and askance,¹² twitching his nose and looking at me while not looking at me.

He was alive—very much alive. But still we were afraid to trespass much on his confidence.

“Father!” My father was arrested¹³ at the

8. The term *sphinx* (SFINK) refers to a still and mysterious thing.

9. In this context, *wantonness* (WAN tih niss) means playfulness.

10. *Pit-singlet* (PIT SING lit) is a woolen or flannel undershirt worn by coal miners.

11. A *miscreant* (MISS kree unt) is an evildoer without a conscience.

12. To sit *askance* (uh SKANTZ) means to sit, glancing sideways with a hint of disapproval.

13. Here, *arrested* means forcibly stopped.

Word Bank

obscure (uh SKYOR) *adj.*: not readily seen, heard, noticed, or understood

circumvent (SIR kum VENT) *v.*: go around or bypass

affronted (uh FRUNT id) *adj.*: offended by an open display of disrespect; insulted

palpitated (PAL pih tate id) *v.*: quivered; trembled; pulsed

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GUIDING THE READING

LITERAL

Q. Why shouldn’t they shower the rabbit with affection?

A. The rabbit becomes withdrawn when showered with too much nurturing.

Q. Where do the children put the rabbit?

A. In the parlor.

Q. How does Mother explain why the rabbit didn’t drink its milk?

A. Mother says that the rabbit prefers to “sulk its life away.”

Q. How did the family know the rabbit survived the night in the scullery?

A. Milk on the floor and rabbit droppings in the saucers were signs of life.

ANALYTICAL

Q. Why does the narrator say they “... must not love it?”

A. Their emotion would overwhelm the creature, already withdrawn.

Q. Why is the rabbit a “strange grey-brown neutralization of life, still living”?

A. The rabbit seemed to reject their attempts to keep it alive, preferring “to sulk its life away.”

Q. Why does the narrator mention that the rabbit’s eye was bright?

A. He could see mischief and life in the eye of the little creature.

Q. Realizing that the rabbit had eaten, the narrator says he was “...afraid to trespass much on his confidence.” What does this mean?

A. The family knows this creature has a will of its own and doesn’t want to be overpowered by them. They try to give the rabbits its “space.”

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SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- When Father comes home, the children excitedly tell him the rabbit is alive.
- By evening, they are enchanted by the rabbit, naming him “Adolf.”
- The children let Adolf wander the house.
- Adolf would even sit on the table at mealtime, sipping milk.
- Mother is not happy with Adolf, who flung his hind-quarters and knocked over a teacup.
- Mother would shoo him away, but Adolf seemed not to care—he kept trying.
- One day he overturned the cream jug. Mother seized the rabbit by the ears and put him on the hearth rug.
- Adolf loves playing in the parlor.



door. “Father, the rabbit’s alive.”

“Sure on you it is,” said my father.

“Mind how you go in.”

By evening, however, the little creature was tame, quite tame. He was named Adolf. We were enchanted by him. We couldn’t really love him, because he was wild and loveless to the end. But he was an unmixed delight.

We decided he was too small to live in a hutch—he must live at large in the house. My mother protested, but in vain. He was so tiny. So we had him upstairs, and he dropped his tiny pills on the bed and we were enchanted.

Adolf made himself instantly at home. He had the run of the house, and was perfectly happy, with his tunnels and his holes behind the furniture.

We loved him to take meals with us. He would sit on the table humping his back, sipping his milk, shaking his whiskers and his tender ears, hopping off and hobbling back to his saucer, with an air of supreme unconcern. Suddenly he was alert. He hobbled a few tiny paces, and reared him-

self up inquisitively at the sugar basin.¹⁴ He fluttered his tiny fore-paws and then reached and laid them on the edge of the basin, while he craned his thin neck and peeped in. He trembled his whiskers at the sugar, then he did the best to lift down a lump.

“Do you think I will have it! Animals in the sugar pot!” cried my mother, with a rap of her hand on the table.

Which so delighted the electric Adolf that he flung his hind-quarters and knocked over a cup.

He continued to take tea with us. He rather liked warm tea. And he loved sugar. Having nibbled a lump, he would turn to the butter. There he was shooed off by our parent. He soon learned to treat her shooing with indifference. Still, she hated him to put his nose in the food. And he loved to do it. And one day between them they overturned the cream-jug. Adolf deluged his little chest, bounced back in terror, was seized by his little ears by my mother and bounced down on the hearth-rug. There he shivered in momentary discomfort, and suddenly set off in a wild flight to the parlor.

This was his happy hunting ground. He had cultivated the bad habit of pensively nibbling certain bits of cloth in the hearthrug. When chased from this pasture he would retreat under the sofa. There he would twinkle in meditation until suddenly, no one knew why, he would go off like an alarm clock. With a sudden bumping scuffle he would whirl out of the room,

14. The *sugar basin* is the sugar bowl.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

- ▶ 13. **Theme:** They enjoy him, but boundaries between wild and tame remain.
- ▶ 14. **Conflict:** Mother is at odds with her family over this wild creature.
- ▶ 15. **Visualization:** Adolf is pictured in loving detail.
- ▶ 16. **Conflict:** Adolf is at war with Mother, even invading her table.
- ▶ 17. **Theme:** Adolf is allowed to intrude into their tea-time.
- ▶ 18. **Narrative/Theme:** Adolf is shown upsetting their domestic life.

Word Bank deluged (DEL yoojd) v.: covered with liquid; flooded
pensively (PEN siv lee) adv.: in a dreamily or wistfully thoughtful way

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GUIDING THE READING

LITERAL

Q. What does the family name the rabbit?

A. Adolf.

Q. Why can’t they love him?

A. They realize Adolf is a wild creature that can’t respond to their affection.

Q. What does Adolf do when the family has meals together?

A. He joins them at the table.

Q. What is Adolf’s response when Mother raps her hand on the table?

A. He knocks over a cup.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

● Adolf grew up fast; it was difficult keeping him inside.

● Once, Adolf wandered out and met a big black and white cat. Adolf rolled back his eyes and screamed, and the children chased the cat away.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

▶ **19. Poetic Imagery:** A wonderful chase scene—Adolf at home in his world.

▶ **20. Characterization/Theme:** The wild world of Adolf and the cat is shown.



going through the doorway with his little ears flying. Then we would hear his thunderbolt hurtling in the parlor, but before we could follow, the wild streak of Adolf would flash past us, on an electric wind that swept him round the scullery and carried him back, a little mad thing, flying possessed like a ball round the parlor. After which ebullition¹⁵ he would sit in a corner composed and distant, twitching his whiskers in abstract meditation. And it was in vain we questioned him about his outburst. He just went off like a gun, and was as calm after it as a gun that smokes placidly.

Alas, he grew up rapidly. It was almost impossible to keep him from the outer door.

One day, as we were playing by the stile,¹⁶ I saw his brown shadow loiter across the road and pass into the field that faced the houses. Instantly a cry of “Adolf!”—a cry he knew full well. And instantly a wind swept him away down the sloping meadow, his tail twinkling and zigzagging through the grass. After him we

pelted. It was a strange sight to see him, ears back, his little loins so powerful, flinging the world behind him. We ran ourselves out of breath, but could not catch him. Then somebody headed him off, and he sat with sudden unconcern, twitching his nose under a bunch of nettles.¹⁷

His wanderings cost him a shock. One Sunday morning my father had just been quarrelling with a pedlar, and we were hearing the aftermath indoors, when there came a sudden unearthly scream from the yard. We flew out. There sat Adolf cowering under a bench, while a great black and white cat glowered intently at him, a few yards away. Sight not to be forgotten. Adolf rolling back his eyes and parting his strange muzzle in another scream, the cat stretching forward in a slow elongation.

Ha, how we hated that cat! How we pur-

15. Here, *ebullition* (EB uh LISH in) means an outburst of spontaneous, wild energy.

16. A *stile* (STY il) refers to a set of steps leading over a fence or wall.

17. *Nettles* (NET ilz) are shrubs with coarse, stinging hairs.

Word Bank

elongation (EE long GAY shun) *n.*: a lengthening or extending

GUIDING THE READING

LITERAL

Q. How does Adolf react to a cat in the yard?

A. He hides, rolls back his eyes, and parts his muzzle in a scream.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Often the rabbit frightened Mother by clumping downstairs. They couldn't let him out because cats prowled outside.
- Then Mother's prized lace curtains were torn

as Adolf ran through them. Entangled, he brought down the curtain rod and smashed her plant.

- Adolf must go back to the woods. Father places him at the edge of a thicket, and the

rabbit hops away indifferently.

- The children worry that other rabbits won't take kindly to Adolf, since he had been a pet. Overall, they are relieved that Adolf is gone.
- Father keeps an eye out for him. He tells the family that he has seen the rabbit and called to him, but Adolf didn't respond.
- At the woods the narrator calls for Adolf, imagining the rabbit would snub him by turning away. He realizes Adolf was a wild creature, one that looked disdainfully at the tame nature of human beings.

sued him over the wall and across the neighbors' gardens.

Adolf was still only half grown.

"Cats!" said my mother. "Hideous detestable animals, why do people harbor them?"

But Adolf was becoming too much for her. He dropped too many pills. And suddenly to hear him clumping downstairs when she was alone in the house was startling. And to keep him from the door was impossible. Cats prowled outside. It was worse than having a child to look after.

21 Yet we would not have him shut up. He became more lusty, more callous¹⁸ than ever. He was a strong kicker, and many a scratch on face and arms did we owe to him. But he brought his own doom on himself. The lace curtains in the parlor—my mother was rather proud of them—fell on the floor very full. One of Adolf's joys was to scuffle wildly through them as though through some foamy undergrowth. He had already torn rents in them.

22 One day he entangled himself altogether. He kicked, he whirled round in a mad nebulous¹⁹ inferno. He screamed—and brought down the curtain-rod with a smash, right on the best beloved pelargonium²⁰, just as my mother rushed in. She extricated him, but she never forgave him. And he never forgave either. A heartless wildness had come over him.

23 Even we understood that he must go. It was decided, after a long deliberation, that my father should carry him back to the wild-woods. Once again he was stowed into the great pocket of the pit-jacket. "Best pop him i' th' pot," said my father,

who enjoyed raising the wind of indignation.

And so, next day, our father said that Adolf, set down on the edge of the coppice²¹, had hopped away with utmost indifference, neither elated nor moved. We heard it and believed. But many, many were the heartsearchings. How would the other rabbits receive him? Would they smell his tameness, his humanized degradation,²² and rend him? My mother pooh-poohed the extravagant idea.

However, he was gone, and we were rather relieved. My father kept an eye open for him. He declared that several times passing the coppice in the early morning, he had seen Adolf peeping through the nettle stalks. He had called him, in an odd-voiced, cajoling fashion. But Adolf had not responded. Wildness gains so soon upon its creatures. And they become so contemptuous then of our tame presence. So it seemed to me. I myself would go to the edge of the coppice and call softly. I myself would imagine bright eyes between the nettle-stalks, flash of a white, scornful tail past the bracken.²³ That insolent white tail, as Adolf turned his flank on us!

18. *Callous* (KAL iss) means hardened.

19. A *nebulous* (NEB yuh liss) inferno is a cloudy or cloudlike area of intense heat.

20. The term *pelargonium* (PEL ahr GO nee um) is the Latin term for geranium, a woody flowering plant.

21. A *coppice* (KAHP iss) is a thicket of small trees or bushes.

22. *Degradation* (DEG rih DAY shun) refers to Adolf's supposed loss of dignity by his associating with humans.

23. *Bracken* (BRAK in) refers to clusters of large ferns.

Word Bank

extricated (EX trih kate id) *v.*: freed or released from entanglement; disengaged

rend *v.*: separate into parts with force or violence; tear apart

cajoling (kuh JOE ling) *adj.*: persuading by flattery or promises; wheedling; coaxing

insolent (IN suh lint) *adj.*: haughtily contemptuous, extremely disrespectful

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GUIDING THE READING

LITERAL

Q. Why does the family decide to return Adolf to the woods?

A. Adolf has become wilder. He entangles himself in Mother's lace curtains, bringing down the rod to smash into her beloved houseplant.

Q. Where does Father place Adolf?

A. He sets him down at the edge of the thicket.

Q. How does Adolf react to being exiled?

A. He hops away with indifference.

Q. What worry does the family have about Adolf?

A. They worry that other animals may reject him because he'd lived in a human home.

Q. Why is the family "rather relieved" that Adolf was gone?

A. He was simply too wild to be cared for in their home.

ANALYTICAL

Q. The story ends: "I myself would imagine bright eyes between the nettle-stalks, flash of a white, scornful tail past the bracken. That insolent white tail, as Adolf turned his flank on us!" What does the narrator mean?

A. The narrator and Adolf know that neither the domain of human beings nor the natural world can hold both man and beast. Boundaries between man and nature must remain. Adolf, returned to the wild again, no longer wants to acknowledge the tame human world.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Adolf can't be grateful or observe boundaries; he lives by his own rules, not theirs. This independent rabbit exposes the fragility of their home. It is likely that, Adolf's final snub will amuse the students, yet the

narrator keenly feels the rabbit's rejection, even if it is only imagined.

QUICK REVIEW

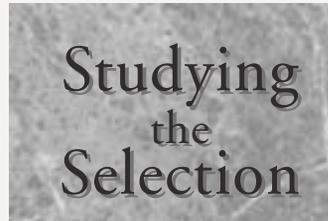
1. Walking home through the fields in the first day-break.
2. On the field path.
3. The scullery.
4. A cat.

IN-DEPTH THINKING

5. Maybe he thinks it's likely they were poisoned, because all four rabbits were found dead of natural causes—not killed by another animal, and the likely cause is food-poisoning.
6. Father is not fully domesticated, uncomfortable with rules. He pours his tea into a saucer, sits down heavily, and drinks from his saucer as a cat would. He then wipes his forearm over his mouth and beard.
7. The rabbit refuses to eat or move, but it stays alive anyway.
8. The animal is overwhelmed by human emotion, withdrawing from anyone approaching him with love.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

9. Mother is the only civilized one in the house! She is reasonable, mannerly, showing common sense. Father is not helpful, but Mother knows mayhem will result from letting a wild animal into the house. Her "voice of condemnation" says the rabbit will die, upsetting the children. She is the lone voice against its presence. Mother is unhappy as chaos ensues, seeing the sympathetic wildness in her children. She is upset when Adolf eats on the table, even taking a lump of sugar from the sugar pot. "The last straw" occurs when Adolf brings down Mother's prized lace curtains onto her favorite house plant. That act signals Adolf's departure from her home.
10. Father can use his strength most effectively down pit. In his home Father feels restricted, hemmed in. He seems too big for the furniture, sitting heavily, and barely making use of cup and saucer. He adores his children and seems to know that they need a 'civilized' setting, but his world of work, with its green fields nearby, offers him more emotional freedom.



First Impressions

Father rescues Adolf. Can a rabbit acknowledge such a gesture? Even imagining a final snub, the narrator tries to live with Adolf but cannot. At story's end, has the narrator accepted that some 'wildness' cannot be tamed?

✓ Quick Review

1. What made Father happy after a long night's work?
2. Where had Father found the rabbit?
3. Where was Adolf moved after spending the first night in the parlor?
4. What other animal did Adolf encounter in the yard one day?

📖 In-depth Thinking

5. Why does Father think the dead mother rabbit has eaten something that killed her and her little ones?
6. How is Father's behavior similar to that of the rabbit?
7. Explain the phrase "Strange grey-brown neutralization of life, still living."
8. If Adolf enchants the family, why does the narrator feel he should not love the animal?

📁 Drawing Conclusions

9. How does Mother differ from the rest of the family?
10. Why does Father seem so uncomfortable in his own home?



FOCUSING ON CONFLICT AS THEME

1. Father's act saved Adolf, but it has not "solved" the man vs. nature conflict. Even in this singular act, Father himself is not credited fully with giving Adolf his life back. The children are the ones who nursed him back to health. The conflicts between man and nature, remain unchanged.
2. Students should be told their story will begin its literary life as a vignette, a sharply focused essay. They will have a thesis and supporting details, *but* the people and facts can then be shaped for dramatic effect.
3. Students should be told this is a debate, not an argument. Likewise, a student debate should not be a matter of winners and losers; it should be a consideration of issues. Do not expect a polished student performance. Above all, they should use facts to support their positions; a debate is not a series of shouted slogans.

CREATING AND WRITING

1. If a student doesn't have a pet, he or she can write about an imagined perfect pet.
2. Students fine-tune their senses during the nature walk. They should pay careful attention to the outdoors, as well as the assignment.
3. Review various books for appropriate material on the theme. If possible, you might suggest Loren Eisely's *The Immense Journey* or Annie Dillard's *The Star Thrower*. Review these books before suggestion them. There are many other books available as well.

on Conflict as Theme

Focusing

1. Adolf is brought home after the mother rabbit dies. Without Father's help, Adolf could not survive. Has Father 'solved' the conflict between man and nature? Write a few paragraphs about Father's dealings with the rabbit.
2. Have you been part of a **man vs. nature** conflict? Write about it, changing details as you turn *your* childhood vignette into a short story.
3. A formal debate usually consists of an opening statement—either for or against a position—followed by supporting material. Then you present material that exposes the weakness of your opponent's position. In closing, you sum up, stating your position even more strongly. Each part needn't take more than two minutes. Choose a classmate for a partner, and prepare to debate another team. Use one of these topics:
 - ◇ Most of us prefer safe *wildness* (zoos or theme parks) over real wilderness.
 - ◇ Animals should be left in their natural habitats.
 - ◇ Endangered animals should be safeguarded in 're-created' habitats.

Creating and Writing

1. Write about a beloved pet. Was the pet allowed to run free in the home, or were boundaries established? Were all boundaries physical?
 2. Take a nature hike, and look for signs of animal life. Use all your senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste—well, maybe not taste!). Nature is ready to teach if we pay attention. Prepare a short speech for the class, entitled "What Nature Can Teach Us."
 3. Ask your teacher to suggest further readings on this theme.
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