



EDUCATOR'S
GUIDE

**MOSDOS
PRESS**

Silver

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES



Hugh Garner

Act of a Hero

Consider This...

You may want to review the literary component of conflict with your students. You may add that conflict in stories is not much different from conflict in life, except that literature provides the relief of resolution in a timely fashion!

Characters have two major types of conflict: external and internal. When the main character has an external conflict, she is struggling with a force outside herself—like the weather or circumstances or another person. When the main character has an internal conflict, he is fighting with himself.

Act of a Hero is surprising in that the main character's debate with himself is never resolved. To the last line of the story, he is questioning the choices he has made. And we are told that he will continue to do so until the end of his life.

Is he a coward or does he behave sensibly? Where is the line between courage and foolhardiness?

Are George's fears reasonable? How would most individuals react to the threat of being burned? Most of us would be terrified of fire.



How much is his behavior influenced by his knowing that the firemen are on their way?

To what degree is his course of action influenced by his realizing that *his* children are not caught in the fire? They are safe with their mother.

Does he carry out the two little girls because he cares about saving them, or because he fears being judged by those who have remained outside the burning building?

Is George a hero in any way?

When we read a story, not only do we want a resolution to the problem presented, we usually want it resolved in a particular way. The end of this story may surprise your students. They may be dissatisfied. Ask them to think about why this is.

Many of us read fiction to enter another world. In that world, when we are children, things often turn out as we would wish. Usually, the world of fiction has happy endings. So when we read fiction, are our expectations realistic? Does fiction teach us to be idealists? Or do we love to read because we *are* idealists?

Most pages are omitted from this preview.

This content is included with purchase of the book.

MOSDOS PRESS

Thinking It Over

1. **What does the kindergarten teacher say, when George Ellsworth questions her? Does her response have the tone you would expect?**

The kindergarten teacher says, “I lost some, I’m afraid.” Students may have various reactions to her saying this. It seems a bit weak—lacking the terror and commitment we would expect a teacher to feel if she left students behind in a blazing fire.

2. **Mr. Ellsworth sees “two small girls” enter a classroom. Why doesn’t he help them? Do you think his reasoning is sound?**

He assumes that they are in no immediate danger from flames or smoke, and that they will be rescued when they are seen from the outside. His reasoning might seem a bit foggy, because all he has to do is go into the classroom and unlatch the window.

3. **What had George often thought about previously? Why did he have such a fantasy?**

George had previously “often thought of rescuing a family from a burning house, especially if it was his own.” The gap between our dreams of heroism and our real-life responses can be anywhere from immense to nonexistent. Which of us knows for sure how we will react in a crisis? We dream in the hopes we will be able to live up to our dreams, should the need arise, and we dream because we enjoy seeing ourselves as heroes, without having to actually do what it takes to be a hero.



- 4. George reasons that perhaps his children have already gotten out. Would that excuse his leaving without trying to help the other children?**

It will be interesting to see how your students react to this.

- 5. Why is George mad at the end of the story? Should he be?**

George is angry because he believes his behavior was cowardly. He is probably ashamed to discuss this, and his silent shame is intensified by the public misunderstanding of how he really felt and behaved. In defense of George, consider the high standards to which he holds himself. Although he was not quite honest with himself at the time of the crisis, he is very honest with himself afterwards. He refuses to silence his own inner voice and be lulled by the public perception of him. He refuses to forgive himself by saying “all’s well that ends well.” Perhaps the future will offer George an opportunity to redeem himself in his own eyes.