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JADE

Part One
Workbook Answer Guide



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This content is included with purchase of the book.

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GETTING STARTED

Ask the students if they know any personal stories about grandparents or others who have come to America from another country. Ask if these people were leaving behind lives of oppression. Have them share stories of challenges faced by these newcomers.

INTO

The Strangers That Came to Town

Ask your students if any of them has ever been a stranger that was trying to become part of a new group. Then ask if anyone has been part of a group that was welcoming a stranger. Ask them to list the difficulties encountered by both sides, and to describe the negative behavior so many people, unfortunately, indulge in. This topic is important and very relevant to your students. Spend some time on it and allow the class to share their feelings, concerns, and suggestions. Point out that, at some time in their lives, each of them will be either a “new person” or a member of a group that is welcoming a new person. Discuss the obligations of both sides. The group should be open, friendly, and helpful. This behavior is not always the case among young adolescents but it is an ideal to work toward. What about the newcomers? They have their obligations, too. They also should be open and friendly. If they are too shy, they will make the group’s job very difficult and uncomfortable; if they are too aggressive, the group will feel resentful. In all likelihood this will be an insightful discussion—many members of your class will have experienced being both a newcomer and a “veteran.”

FOCUS

This story explores **character motivation**. Ask your students what motivates each of the major characters and what motivates the behavior of the townspeople. Why is it important to understand what motivates a person? Consider that much of modern psychology is an effort to understand what motivates people to act as they do. When we understand someone’s motivation, we can understand the person better, understand the action better, and, if necessary, help the person to change. Understanding a character’s motivation in a work of fiction is critical to identifying the story’s theme.

What motivates each of the characters in *The Strangers That Came to Town*?

- Mr. Duvitch is motivated by the desire to make a better life for himself and his family.
- Mrs. Duvitch is motivated by her qualities of reserve, respect, perfectionism, generosity, and altruism.
- The Duvitch children are motivated by shyness and the desire to fit in and do well. Point out to students that no member of the Duvitch family is motivated by hate, jealousy, competitiveness, selfishness, prejudice, or laziness.
- The boys’ father is motivated by strong principles, character, kindness, fairness, and logic.
- The boys’ mother is motivated by kindness, sympathy, and principle.

WORKBOOK TIE-IN

Student Edition: Pages 36-41

Teacher’s Answer Guide: Page 3

Blueprint FOR READING

Into • *The Strangers That Came to Town*

Have you ever been “the new kid on the block”? Did you ever go to a summer camp where everyone knew everyone else—except for you? Have you ever joined a class that had been together for years? How were you treated? How did you feel? How long did it take until you felt as though you were part of the group? Now, let’s take a look at how you, the newcomer, behaved to everyone else. Were you friendly, or were you very shy? Did you greet people first, or did you wait to be greeted? Did you volunteer to help others or did you worry only about yourself? What about when you were part of an old group and somebody else was new? Were you friendly to newcomers, or did you ignore them? Were you the first to welcome someone, or were you afraid your friends would laugh at you if you did? *The Strangers That Came to Town* is about the changes that take place when some new people come to an old town.

Focus

Why do people behave the way they do? Sometimes they are imitating others; sometimes they are doing what they are told to do; sometimes they have certain principles by which they live. In *The Strangers That Came to Town*, you will read about many types of behavior, some of it admirable, some of it, not. What makes each character behave a certain way? Another way of asking this question is, what motivates each character? People may be motivated by feelings like idealism, greed, fear, or love. As you read the selection, ask yourself what is motivating the behavior of each character. The author wants you to ask this question, because the message of the story can be found in its answer.

About the Author

American author **AMBROSE FLACK** was born in 1902, and grew up in Syracuse, New York. His family members were great admirers of the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. He describes his meeting with the President in a well-known story, *Theodore Roosevelt and My Gold Fountain Pen*. Ambrose Flack wrote many stories with children as the central characters. *The Strangers That Came to Town* is such a story. Many of his writings were published in popular magazines.

- The two boys are motivated by selfishness, prejudice, and meanness. Later, they are motivated by a desire to earn their father’s respect, respect for the Duvitches, and the principles they have finally absorbed from their parents.
- The townspeople are motivated by selfishness, prejudice, provincialism, and then, respect for Father, self-interest, conformity, and, perhaps, a little basic decency.

This general overview will be helpful when discussing what motivates each character in this powerful story.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Andy, the narrator, and his brother Tom, are recovering from colds and watch as a new family drives up to the cottage across the street and unloads their belongings from a truck.
- The new family, the Duvitches, are the first European immigrants to move into the neighborhood.

Ambrose Flack



The Strangers That Came to Town

The first of April came dark and stormy, with silver whips of lightning cracking open the lowering clouds that seemed to skim the treetops. My brother Tom and I, recovering from chest colds, tired of reading and listening to the radio, turned to the big living-room window of our house on Syringa Street.

“Here they come, Mother,” cried Tom when a big truck drove up in the teeming rain and stopped in front of the empty cottage across the street.

Mother hurried in from the kitchen and we three looked out. That truck, we knew, contained the Duvitch family and all their earthly possessions.

Mr. Duvitch and the biggest boy carefully helped Mrs. Duvitch from the seat and walked her into the house, supporting her all the way. Another big boy, carrying a well-bundled baby, followed. A stream of young Duvitches, accompanied by a big brown houndlike dog, poured out of the back of the truck and stood in a huddle in the rain.

The barnyard sounds we heard escaped from two crates of hens the Duvitches had fetched along and from a burlap bag in which a small flock of ducks had been stowed. While the live-stock made noises according to its kind, the Duvitches were quiet—almost solemn. They showed no elation at finding themselves in a new neighborhood and a very pretty neighborhood at that.

All afternoon Mother, Tom and myself had been watching out for them, with rather mixed emotions. For the Duvitches were immigrants and the first of their nationality to settle in our small smug town. Coming to our obscure part of the state a year before, they had moved into a rotting old farmhouse two miles north of town, long abandoned. After the slashing hurricane of mid-March, the moss-rotten dwelling looked like the house in the fairy tale that remained standing only because it did not know which way to fall and the Duvitches were forced to give it up.

“I wonder if Mrs. Duvitch is ill,” murmured Mother, looking through the rain at the dreary street scene.

“She must be,” said Tom. “I wonder if it’ll be all right for Andy and me to help ‘em move in their stuff.”

This request, as Mother well knew, was not inspired by genuine feeling for the Duvitches but by curiosity and she shook her head. It was a strict family rule that any illness which kept us out of school would automatically keep us indoors.

But the Duvitches got along very well without help from us. As it turned out, they were old hands at moving. For years before coming to America they had been on the move, to escape starvation, separation, possible assassination. Every child capable of two-legged locomotion pitched in and helped carry the

Word Bank	teeming (TEEM ing) <i>v.</i> : swarming, as with people or animals; falling in torrents, as with rain
	elation (ee LAY shun) <i>n.</i> : delight
	obscure (ub SKYOR) <i>adj.</i> : remote and secluded; not prominent or famous

The Strangers That Came to Town / 55

LITERARY COMPONENTS

1. **Conflict:** The move of the Duvitch family into the neighborhood sets the plot of the story in motion. The fact that they are the first immigrants in “our small smug town” sets up the man against man conflict.
2. **Characterization:** We learn that the narrator’s family has strict, logical rules for the children.
3. **Characterization:** We learn that the Duvitch family has suffered oppression in Europe. This explains their meek acceptance of the treatment they receive from the townspeople. They are used to worse treatment.

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

- Q. Why does Mother think Mrs. Duvitch might be ill?**
- A. Mother fears that Mrs. Duvitch is ill; her husband and her biggest boy carefully help her out of the truck and support her as they walk her into their new house.

Analytical

- Q. What is a possible reason for Mrs. Duvitch’s weak condition?**
- A. There is a baby, so she might be recuperating from childbirth. Or she may be weak because the family has suffered hardship in Europe.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- After the Duvitches are settled, Mother sends over a basket of food, and the next day they return her basket and give her a beautiful plant.
- When mother tries to visit, she is told that Mrs. Duvitch is sick in bed; Mother assumes the Duvitches want their privacy.
- Although the neighborhood seems to be a friendly one, there is some suspicion of this new family, since they are immigrants and because they are poor and meek.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

4. **Narration:** The narrative voice here is not that of the seventeen-year-old Andy. It is the adult Andy looking back and analyzing why things were the way they were. He uses verbal irony when he says the town had “no more greed, envy, superstition or intolerance than lurked behind the doors of any average...American town.” He continues by twice saying that Syringa Street seemed friendly. He implies that it wasn’t as friendly as it seemed.
5. **Characterization:** The ignorant, ridiculous rumors about Mrs. Duvitch cause Father such distress that he feels the need for a drink. This shows a contrast between Father and the townspeople. He does not share their bigotry, prejudice, and love of gossip.

things from the truck. In no time at all, it seemed, the truck was empty and the Duvitches were shut up tight in their new home.

That was the signal for Mother to step into the kitchen. She returned swathed in her hooded raincoat, carrying a basket containing a vacuum jug of chicken soup, a baked tuna-fish dish, steaming hot; a loaf of fresh bread and a chocolate cake. These she took to the house across the street and gave basket and all to the boy who answered her knock. It wasn’t her plan to stop for a visit that day but to wait a week or so and call when the Duvitches were all settled.

The next day when the three of us—Mother, Tom and myself—were having lunch, we heard a faint tap at the back door. I answered it and there stood a pale dark-eyed boy, looking very solemn, holding our basket. It contained the empty vacuum jug, casserole dish and cake plate, all of which shone, and a tiny very shapely potted rose tree, an exquisite pink-tipped bud, the handsomest plant—and the only plant of its kind—ever seen in that neighborhood.

“I send them a few scraps of food,” murmured Mother, a few seconds later, deeply touched, “and get this queenly gift!”

That was our last traffic with the Duvitch family for over two years. When Mother stopped to visit them a week after their coming, the little girl who opened the door a few inches said, “Mamma sick; she stay in bed today.” Mrs. Duvitch never crossed the street to our house and Mother, a rather formal woman, made no further attempts to see the family. But Father disagreed when she remarked that she thought the Duvitches probably wished to be left alone.

Word Bank swathed (SWAWTHD) v.: wrapped

Syringa Street seemed to be a friendly street. It was a crooked maple-shady country lane that wound through the town without losing its charm. The sidewalk here and there was almost lost in weeds and the ditches, in places, were brightened by clumps of orange day lilies. Widely spaced cottages, some of them smothered in vines, only seemed to make the neighborhood more rural. There were brilliant flower gardens, vegetable plots, fruit trees—and a few henhouses. The children, who enjoyed all the benefits of country life while actually living in town, were quite numerous. Behind the facades of the street’s dwellings there was probably no more greed, envy, superstition or intolerance than lurked behind the doors of any average dwelling in any average American town. The cardinal virtues, no doubt, were all represented. Yes, Syringa Street seemed to be a friendly street.

But the Duvitches were marked people. They were the one struggling family in a prosperous community—and poverty, amid prosperity, is often embarrassing and irritating to the prosperous. They were considered unattractive physically. They were so meek! The Duvitches never fought back.

The women started in on Mrs. Duvitch because she “never showed her face.” It is true, she was rarely if ever seen in the daytime, emerging from her dwelling only after dark in warm weather, to sit on the veranda, where she found privacy behind the ragged trumpet creeper. But this gave rise to the rumor that she was the victim of an obscure skin disease and that every morning she shook scales out of the bed sheet. (When my father heard that one, he went out to the pantry and mixed himself a tall drink.)

1. *Cardinal* (KAR din al) means most important.

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

- Q. Why are the Duvitches a “marked” family?**
A. They are poor, unappealing, and meek.

Analytical

- Q. Why are the Duvitches irritating to the others on the street?**
A. “They were the one struggling family in a prosperous community,” and that is often irritating and embarrassing to the prosperous.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Mr. Duvitch has an unpleasant job, which causes him and his children to be teased by other neighborhood children.
- The Duvitch children suffer assorted illnesses and injuries, and the family seems prone to bad luck.
- The children scavenge the dump for shoes and clothes and steal fruits and vegetables from local farmers.
- In school, the Duvitch children are smart and hardworking but excessively shy.

Mr. Duvitch, too, was classified as an untouchable. His job, a rather malodorous² one, was with the local rendering plant as a laborer. It followed that the Syringa Street young, meeting him on the street, sometimes stopped their noses as they passed him by—a form of torment all the more acute when Mr. Duvitch had to share it with the children that happened to be with him.

Black hard luck seemed to be their lot.

A few weeks after they moved to Syringa Street they suffered a tragedy they were all summer in recovering from—Mr. Duvitch lost two weeks' pay while gathering mushrooms in Tamarack Swamp. Inside of a year and a half, three Duvitch boys had lost, among them, by various mishaps, two fingers, one eye and an ear lobe. They were forever being cut up, bruised, mutilated by things falling, breaking, cracking and exploding.

A mild case of typhoid, mass cases of whooping cough and measles—all plagued the family within a year of their arrival. Their only bright spot here was Dr. Switzer, one of the town's kindest souls. He declined to accept fees, but was several times seen leaving the Duvitch cottage, carrying off a handsome house plant and looking very pleased. The Duvitches' dog, Kasimar, acted just like the family to which he belonged—like one of the world's poorest canine relations. He seemed to be afraid of his own shadow and no one had ever heard him bark or growl.

Because they cast their eyes on the sidewalk as one passed them by and spoke only when spoken to, the young Duvitches, like their parents, were considered antisocial. They were regarded

as born scavengers too, for they spent hours foraging³ in the town dump, where they often picked up their footgear, some of their pants and shirts and furnishings for the house as well. They went on country excursions to gather watercress, dandelion greens, mushrooms and wild berries; and the few apples and tomatoes they occasionally concealed under their blouses didn't make the farmers on whom they poached much poorer. Tom and I raided tomato patches and robbed apple trees just for the fun of it.

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That first September four Duvitches—Irving, Benny, Abe and Esther—registered at the local grammar school. Mrs. Lovejoy, the principal, said they were bright, conscientious, pathetically eager but almost pathologically⁴ shy. Before she could put a stop to it, some of their classmates scoffed at the leaf-lard-and-black-bread sandwiches they ate for lunch, huddled in one corner of the recreation room, dressed in their boiled-out ragpickers' clothes. After school they headed straight for home, never lingering on the playground.

Even the tradesmen to whom the Duvitches gave good money were either curt with them or downright rude. Mrs. Frithjof Kinsella, the proprietor of the general store and a big jolly Viking who could be heard two blocks away, extended credit to almost everybody in town and had a way of insulting her customers so heartily that they all loved her for it. The Duvitches, however, Mrs. Kinsella very carefully did not insult (a form of insult in itself) and neither did she extend them credit.

But Mother, remembering the potted rose tree, always had a friendly word and a smile for the young Duvitches

2. *Malodorous* (mal OWĒ dur ess) means strong or bad-smelling.

3. *Foraging* (FOR uh jing) means searching about.

4. *Pathologically* (PATH uh LAH ik lee) means abnormally.

Word Bank canine (KAY nyn) *n.*: dog

The Strangers That Came to Town / 57

LITERARY COMPONENTS

6. **Characterization; Foreshadowing:** This shows Tom and Andy's inclination to mischief. This also foreshadows the more serious mischief they cause later.

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

Q. Why do the Duvitch boys poach apples and tomatoes from the farmers?

A. Their family is poor and can't afford such treats.

Q. Why do Tom and Andy poach apples and tomatoes from the farmers?

A. They do it for the fun of it; they enjoy mischief.

Analytical

Q. What does the poaching show about the difference between the Duvitch boys and Tom and Andy?

A. The Duvitches take things because they are poor; Tom and Andy take things for the thrill of it. In other words, it is a distinction without a difference.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- About two years after the Duvitches move in, Father and the two boys go on a fishing trip.
- The Duvitches are fishing at the same campsite.
- Father makes friendly conversation with the family, but Andy and Tom plan to play a nasty prank on them.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

7. **Characterization:** Father's decency and politeness to Maria Duvitch, regardless of her status, set him apart from the rest of the town as a man of fairness, justice, and compassion.
8. **Characterization:** Andy, as narrator, is honest about his lack of courtesy (he calls himself a Philistine, which signifies a person lacking sensitivity) and admits being different from his father, who treats the neighbors with decency and courtesy.

7

when she saw them and a bone for Kasimar when he found courage to venture across the road. Father was the only man on Syringa Street who tipped his hat to sixteen-year-old Maria Duvitch, when he met her coming home from her piece-work job in Miller's Box Factory. It may have been that their European travail⁵ made it easy for them to endure such a trifle as humiliation in America.

"I think," said Father one fine Saturday morning in July two years after the Duvitches had come to Syringa Street, "that it would be very pleasant for Andy, Tom and myself to pitch our tent out at Durston's Pond and spend the night. We could fish and swim. That is," he added, "if Mother can spare us."

"I can spare you very well," Mother said cheerfully.

She had a notion it did menfolk good to get away occasionally and in this instance the sacrifice came easily, because camp life was little to her liking. She packed a hamper of food, Tom and I fetched a tent from the attic and Father looked over his fishing tackle. An hour after lunch we were driving through rolling farm country out to Durston's Pond, four miles north of town.

We often had the serene little lake all to ourselves but on our arrival that afternoon we found half a dozen male Duvitches in possession. They had been fishing for several hours, casting from the shore, dropping their lines over the wooden bridge that spanned Cat Creek where it flowed into the pond and trolling for bass from a flat-bottomed rowboat.

8

Tom and I, Philistines⁶ like our friends, ignored the Duvitch boys but Father went up to Mr. Duvitch, who was fishing from the shore, and put out his hand.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Duvitch! It's nice to see you and the boys here. What a beautiful day! Are Mrs. Duvitch and the girls all well?"

Mr. Duvitch was a little fellow, a lean starveling of a man with watery blue eyes and a kicked-about look. Gratitude for being agreeably noticed showed in his mosquito-bitten face as he took Father's hand and his tremulous smile showed broken teeth.

"I know the mosquitoes are biting," Father went on pleasantly, "but are the fish?"

Proudly, oh, so proudly, Mr. Duvitch exhibited the catch that would probably feed his family for the better part of a week: a fine mess of bass, perch and sunfish, all of them alive, as far as I could see, and swimming around in the oaken washtub in which they had been dropped. Father gave Mr. Duvitch hearty congratulations and said we couldn't hope to do as well but that we'd try.

We three pitched the tent on a little knoll over the pond, and then Father, with a happy sigh, lay down on the blanket for a nap in the sun. Tom and I played a game of chew-the-peg on the grassy bank above the water and, later on, made several trips to the tent, for the camera, the field glasses, the sun lotion. On a trip for a cold drink from the vacuum jug and to fetch towels and soap, we stopped to look again at the Duvitches' catch of fish.

Mr. Duvitch and the boys had moved away and were fishing in a small arm of the pond below us. None of them seemed visible. Tom and I, our glances meeting over the big cake of soap in my hand, were similarly and wickedly inspired—the thing was irresistible. We held a brief whispering conversation; and then, egged on by him and quite willing on my own, I played a shameful

5. Their *travail* (truh VAYL) means their agony and intense pain.

6. Here, *Philistines* (FILL ih STEENZ) refers to people with little to no sensitivity.

GUIDING THE READING

Analytical

Q. Why do Tom and Andy ignore the Duvitches at the lake?

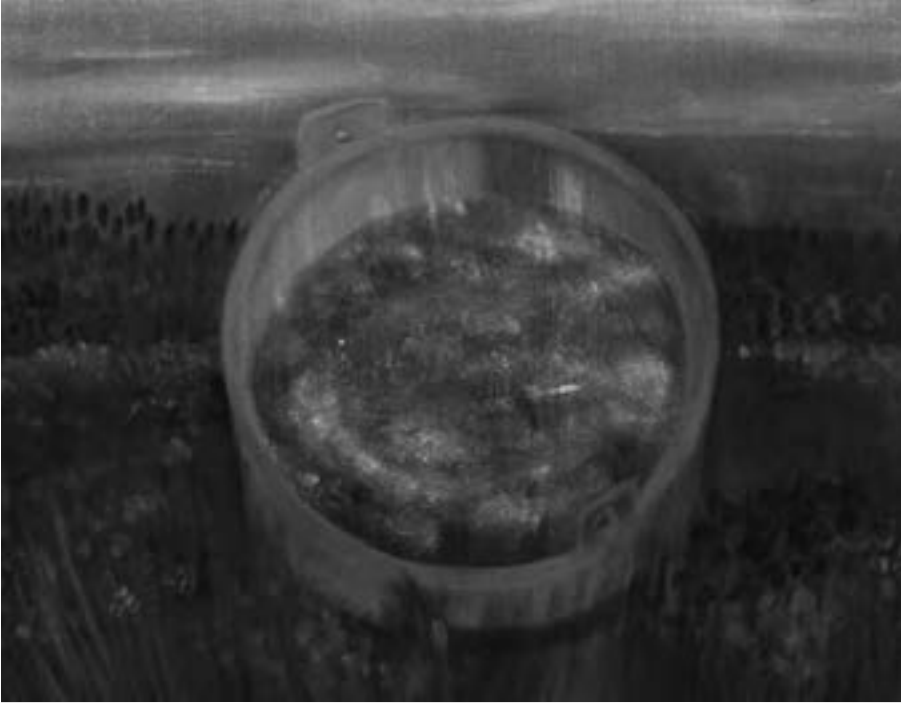
- A. Like their friends, they are not kind to the Duvitches, and probably feel superior to them.

Q. Why and how does Father greet the Duvitches?

- A. They are neighbors and Father is a man of decency and compassion who acknowledges everyone. He shakes hands with Mr. Duvitch, inquires about the rest of the family, and congratulates Mr. Duvitch on all the fish the Duvitches have caught.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Andy, with Tom’s approval, drops a bar of soap into the bucket containing the Duvitches’ catch of fish, thus killing them all.
- When the dead fish are discovered, Father calls the boys in from their swim, and with cold fury, makes them apologize.



trick on the Duvitches, the memory of which will come back to the end of my days to plague me. Without considering further, I dropped the cake of soap into the tub of fish.

“Let’s go,” whispered Tom after we had watched the soap sink to the bottom.

We swam out to the raft, diving and frolicking in the deep water. After a while the Duvitches, calling it a day, assembled at a spot on the shore below our tent, happy in the knowledge of a good catch to take home.

In a little while Tom and I could hear their muffled exclamations of disbelief and dismay. Father woke up and joined our neighbors in a conclave,⁷ looking down at the tub of fish near his feet. After a few moments he produced the whistle he carried on all our country

excursions and blew it piercingly three times, the proclamation of emergency. This meant that Tom and I must come at once.

Looking as guilty as we felt, we swam in and joined the group gathering around the tub. In the midst of our stricken neighbors stood Father, holding the half-melted cake of soap in his palm silently but accusingly, for the fish had perished miserably in the soapy water and were unfit to eat. Not only had Tom and I snatched precious food from their mouths but we had brazenly⁸ advertised the contempt in which we held them.

Father’s eyes were narrow slits of

7. A *conclave* (KAHN klayv) is a private gathering.

8. *Brazenly* (BRAY zin lee) means boldly and shamelessly.

The Strangers That Came to Town / 59

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

Q. What trick do Tom and Andy play on the Duvitches?

A. They put a bar of soap in the Duvitches’ bucket of fish, killing the fish and making them unfit to eat.

Analytical

Q. Why is Tom and Andy’s prank so terribly cruel?

A. The Duvitches have worked all day to catch the fish—it was not recreation for them. The fish could have fed their

entire family for the better part of a week. Instead, Tom and Andy deprived the Duvitches of their food and also of their pride. They did this in a cruel display of contempt for the Duvitches, whom they considered inferior.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- The Duvitches are not resentful; they seem used to oppression and almost embarrassed by the apologies of the “ruling class” boys.
- Father orders the boys to go out on the lake and remain there until they have caught enough fish to replace the ones they have poisoned.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

9. **Verbal Irony:** The narrator uses verbal irony here—characterizing himself and Tom as “the lords of the ruling manor.” This is how the Duvitches see them, and this is almost how Tom and Andy see themselves. The irony is that the adult Andy realizes the error and cruelty of this attitude.

blue fire in his white face. I had never seen him so angry. One look at Tom and me told him everything. Words would have been superfluous and my brother and I bowed our heads in acknowledgment of our guilt.

“You will begin,” Father said in a voice I didn’t recognize, “by saying you’re sorry.”

Our stunned neighbor wiped his blinking eyes as he listened to our mumbled words, which Father made us repeat when they were inaudible. But there was no hostility, no animosity toward us in the man and it was obvious also that he considered himself too humble to receive an apology, finding it, like most of life’s troubles, a mockery to be endured without protest. His sons showed no resentment, either, only a kind of resignation in their minds, which carried almost atavistic memories⁹ of century-old oppression by country barons and landed gentry.

One-eyed Manny Duvitch, as it turned out, had told Father he had seen me drop something in the tub of fish (before he learned that it had been a cake of soap). Now he looked guiltier than Tom and I. Because he had been the witness and accuser, it was as if he considered himself to be the troublemaker, deserving the punishment. **The two real culprits were the young lords of the ruling manor, with unlimited license, exempt from chastisement.**¹⁰ To Manny, the fortunate, the well-to-do, were also the privileged.

“Do you realize,” said Father coldly, looking from Tom to me, “that in certain primitive communities the sort of

stunt you’ve pulled would be punishable by death?”

Tom and I did not reply.

“Turn over the tub,” said Father abruptly, addressing us as if we were strangers.

We turned it over. The gray soapy water ran away in bubbly rivulets, disappearing in the coarse mat of turf, and the poisoned fish lay exposed on the grass—quiet, strangled, open-mouthed—and somehow looking as if they were mutely protesting their horrid unnatural fate.

“Count the fish,” Father ordered us, his voice like steel.

Tom and I got down on our knees.

“How many are there?” demanded Father.

“Sixty-one,” I said.

“How many bass?”

“Twelve.”

Father handed Mr. Duvitch two dollars, the price of a day’s rental of the rowboat. Then, looking both the avenging angel and executioner, he ordered Tom and me, with our tackle and bait, off the land we had disgraced—into exile, out on Durston’s Pond.

“And you are not to come back,” he gave out in the same steely tones, “until you’ve caught sixty-one fish to repay Mr. Duvitch. See to it that among them you bring in at least a dozen bass.”

Father stepped up to the tent on the knoll to fetch our shirts and dungarees. These he rolled into a tight ball and shot like a bolt into the rowboat. He then turned his back to us and, thus disowned, Tom and I lost no time in rowing out on the pond. Father’s decisions, even with Mother present, were never reversed and swift execution, from which there was no appeal, followed his sentences.

9

Word Bank
contempt (kun TEMPT) *n.*: scorn
superfluous (suh PER floo USS)
adj.: being more than is sufficient; unnecessary; needless
animosity (AN ih MAHS ih tee) *n.*: ill-will; dislike
mutely (MYOOT lee) *adv.*: silently

9. *Atavistic* (AT uh VISS tik) *memories* are memories inherited from prior generations.

10. *Exempt from chastisement* (CHASS tyz mint) means not subject to punishment.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- They start in the late afternoon, and by nightfall, they are plagued by mosquitoes.

Out in the middle of the big pond we dropped anchor, threaded our steel rods and, baiting our hooks, began to fish. I knew that if it took us all summer to catch them, we dared not set foot ashore without sixty-one fish. Almost at once Tom pulled in a good-sized bass and ten minutes later two yellow perch were added to our string. The crestfallen Duvitches went home. Father threw himself on the blanket, furiously smoking a cigar. That was about four in the afternoon.

Oh, the mosquitoes! They were bad enough at the time, and while the light held, but after we had been fishing for three hours and had caught eight fish, they swarmed out of the swampland surrounding the pond in legions.

After an hour of it we wanted to leap overboard. They got in our ears, our noses, our eyes, even in our mouths, and nestling in our hair, they bit through to our scalps. I remembered tales of Indian prisoners in Alaska, turned loose on the tundra¹¹ by their captors, where

they died of the mosquitoes in two hours. Several times we slipped over the side of the boat, immersing ourselves in the water to escape the bloodthirsty clouds. The night dragged on while the whining swarms grew thicker.

"Andy, what time is it?"

"Ten o'clock, Tom."

"Is that all?" Tom groaned and pulled in another bass and killed six or eight mosquitoes in one slap. Two hours passed and midnight was ghostly on Durston's Pond.

The moon, bright as day, sailed high in the purple sky, dimming the starfire, casting a great white shaft of quivering radiance on the water, but it was all hideous. The big yellow disk sank in a gauzy cloud bank, then disappeared for good and the stars shone out with renewed splendor.

"Andy, what time is it?"

"Two o'clock, Tom."

11. *Tundra* (TUN druh) is any of the vast, nearly treeless plains of the world's arctic regions.



The Strangers That Came to Town / 61

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- They stay out on the lake all night, fishing and being bitten by mosquitoes.
- As the sun rises, things don't get any better; by eleven o'clock, Tom and Andy begin to bake in the sun.
- An audience of townspeople begins to gather and watch; they place bets as to how long it will take the boys to catch sixty-one fish.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

10. **Characterization:** Andy feels the responsibility of being the older brother. He now realizes he should have kept Tom out of trouble instead of encouraging him.
11. **Characterization:** Father is described as guarding the shore and barring the way. He does not back down. In a quiet way, he has great power.

The treetops whispered as if in conspiracy against us. Owls hooted—mockingly we thought—and bats circled over our heads, making us feel thoroughly alone. Our only solace was the campfire Father kept burning near the tent, which flared like a beacon of light in the dark. We went on fishing as our tormentors bit and sang. Each hour was an eternity of frenzy and I fairly panted for the light of dawn to come, but even now I cannot decide which was worse, that night with the mosquitoes on Durston's Pond or the following day in the blistering heat.

"Andy—"

"It's four o'clock, Tom, and we've got sixteen fish."

Dawn came but even I, a highly impressionable youngster of seventeen, did not enjoy that calm effulgent¹² majesty of daybreak. A long stretch on Durston's Pond, under the July sun, still faced us.

The rising sun was red, casting glimmering circles of rose-colored light on the windless surface of the pond. The mosquitoes thinned, the fish continued to bite. But as we fished the sun mounted steadily and by eleven it had fulfilled its awful prophecy and became a ball of fire in the cloudless skies. Tom and I began to bake in the heat waves that shimmered over the pond and we were steamed in the scalding vapory mist.

"I wish it was night again, Andy," groaned Tom after sweating out two hours of it. "This is worse than the mosquitoes."

"At least we won't get any infections from our bites, Tom," I said feebly.

Word Bank **solace** (SAHL uss) *n.*: comfort
cauterizing (KAUT er IZE ing) *v.*: burning, with a hot iron
berated (bee RAYT id) *v.*: scolded; expressed sharp, stern disapproval of

"The sun's cauterizing them."

"We might get sunstrokes, though. We're liable to, without our hats. But I don't care if I do. I'd rather be unconscious."

Tom was only fifteen and I think he hated me that day. I, the older, should have been his protector against participation in crime, not his accomplice. I wanted to row him in, then come back to finish the business alone, but there on the green Eden-like shore stood Father, stationed there barring the way.

Tom and I weighed our hooks down to the deep cold water. We caught two more bass and half a dozen sunfish.

By one o'clock groups of people gathered on the shore, for word of the drama that was being enacted on Durston's Pond had spread through the town. Some of the visitors praised Father for his stern discipline; others berated him. He went right on reading his magazine and smoking his cigar, as indifferent to their praise as he was to their criticism.

Local fishermen who knew the lake and something about the angling ability of the average youngster made gloomy estimates as to the possible length of our exile on the water. A few had us fishing until the snow flew. They made bets too. Would Tom and I have the guts to stick it out? Most of the bets were against us.

But we sat there in the rowboat, without food, through the hottest day of the summer.

No breeze stirred. No cloud obscured the sun. Even the bird life of the swamp, usually a medley of song, was silent and dead. Tom was drooping visibly in the glare and I tried hard not to look at his scorched face.

Between three and four we dropped lines in a school of yellow perch and pulled up no less than twenty. The bass

12. *Effulgent* (ih FUL jint) is a brilliant radiance.

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

- Q. What are some of the hardships the boys suffer while fishing?**
- A. In the evening they are bitten by mosquitoes; the next day they suffer from the heat, hunger, sunburn, and fatigue.

Analytical

- Q. Why don't the boys give up and come in?**
- A. They know better than to disobey their father. His decisions are never reversed.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- By four in the afternoon, the boys feel they are in the home stretch after catching many bass and yellow perch.
- As the sun sets, Tom and Andy finish their mission, and sunburned, starving, and exhausted, they row to shore.
- Father receives them coolly; nonetheless, Andy feels triumphant.

continued to bite in the deep black holes off the swamp, which bristled with tree trunks. Benumbed, half-blinded, moving like automatons,¹³ Tom and I geared ourselves for the home stretch.

When the sun, dropping low, had lost its fury and the hard blue enamel of the sky began to pale, I pulled up the thirteenth bass, which was our sixty-first fish.

Turned lobster-red, fairly devoured, famished and drooping from lack of sleep, we put together our rods and with our remaining strength rowed to where Father was waiting.

He received us coolly, making no comment on our condition. At once he asked to see the fish and we held them up by the strings.

“Count them,” he said.

Obviously we would receive permission to land only when we had produced the required number, which was the price of our freedom.

“Sixty-one,” said Tom.

“Including thirteen bass,” I added.

“Very good,” said Father in businesslike tones. “We will now restore to Mr. Duvitch his rightful property.”

Tom and I took care not to play the part of triumphant heroes, even of redeemed sinners—that would not have suited our parent. Certainly, in

¹³ *Automatons* (aw TOM uh tahnz) are machine-like robots.



The Strangers That Came to Town / 63

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- When Tom and Andy bring the fish to Mr. Duvitch, he says that he did not wish for the boys to suffer so much.
- When asked to shake their hands, Mr. Duvitch breaks down.
- Later, Mrs. Duvitch comes to the boys' house for the first time and tries to give the boys' family a "cherished possession" as a peace offering.
- Mother refuses the present; she assures Mrs. Duvitch how pleased she is the boys atoned for their prank. Mrs. Duvitch's gesture to them seems to be a silent thank you.
- Father decides it is time for the bad feeling against the Duvitches to stop; he has arranged for a fish-fry for the two families at the Duvitches' house.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

12. **Characterization:** Andy is secretly proud that he and Tom were able to accomplish their mission. He also realizes Father has suffered with them.
13. **Climax; Resolution:** The return and acceptance of the fish is the climax of the story. The rest—the dinner with the Duvitches and their acceptance by the townspeople—is the resolution; it resolves the conflict.

12

appearance, we were more condemned than redeemed. But when we tottered out of the rowboat something in me was quietly rejoicing. I guessed that Father was secretly proud of our fortitude and I realized, too, that all through the night he had suffered with us.

We walked through the crowd of visitors on the lake shore, climbed into the car and silently drove to the Duvitch cottage. Mrs. Duvitch and the children were not visible but we found Mr. Duvitch sitting on the porch.

When he saw Tom and me and we silently handed him the strings of fish, he gulped and swallowed hard. For a moment he could not speak. Then, in a voice that was raw with emotion, he protested that he had not wished us to suffer so. Suppose we had fallen overboard in the dark?

"Will you shake hands with the boys?" asked Father.

13

Instead, Mr. Duvitch broke down. My brother and I did not know where to look and during those moments we suffered more acutely than we had suffered in the clouds of mosquitoes and under the broiling sun. After our neighbor had composed himself, he seized our hands and bowed his head over them. There was something Biblical in the man's gesture. Anyway, it was my greatest lesson in humility.

When Mother, who had heard about our exile on the pond from a neighbor, saw us she burst into tears. She tried to embrace us but we drew back painfully. While she was rubbing salves and ointments on our seared backs and necks, somebody knocked at the kitchen door and Father opened it to find Mrs. Duvitch standing there—the first time she had crossed the street to our house.

In her pale swaying hand Mrs. Duvitch held a porcelain teacup, ornamented with pink rosebuds and golden

leaves—a relic from the old country and, as it turned out, her most cherished possession.

Her voice, thin and wispy from fright and shock, was difficult to follow. But we gathered that she had brought the teacup over as a peace offering and as a plea for our forgiveness to her family for the living purgatory,¹⁴ no matter whose fault, through which my brother and I had passed. When Mother declined the teacup and assured Mrs. Duvitch that she would not have it otherwise with Tom and me, our neighbor, unable to find her tongue, made a little eloquent sign with her hands that was for thanks and that looked like a silent blessing. She quietly turned and went away; and again I felt that I had witnessed a profound moment.

Mother continued her ministrations¹⁵ to Tom and me and put us to bed. Despite our skin, which stuck to sheet and pillowcase, we slept like creatures drugged.

"It is high time," Tom and I heard Father say calmly, sanely, to Mother around noon the next day when we woke up, "for this senseless feeling against the Duvitches to stop and I'm willing to do still more to stop it. Tonight we are having supper with them. I've just seen Mr. Duvitch and he remarked that since Andy and Tom caught the fish, he'd feel better if we all shared in them. I suggested a fish-fry picnic supper and with a few hints from me, and some encouragement, he invited us over. It may be an ordeal but we ought to be able to bear it."

We walked across the street at six o'clock, not knowing what to expect.

14. Here, *purgatory* (PURG uh TOR ee) means drawn-out punishment.

15. *Ministrations* (MIN ih STRAY shunz) are acts of aid and relief.

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- The Duvitches' house is clean and fresh. It is nicely, though scantily, furnished. The children are dressed in their best clothing, and they are beaming with pride and pleasure at having their first guests.
- In contrast to their public shyness, the Duvitch family members come to life in the security of their own home; Mr. Duvitch, as host, seems to grow almost as tall as Father.
- The surprise of the evening comes when the Duvitches are revealed as people of good breeding, many accomplishments, humor, warmth, and merriment who—as Father said—have been looked down on by their inferiors.

14

All the Duvitches, dressed in their Sunday best, bright and flushed and shining as we had never seen them, received us at the door as if we had been royalty. They looked at Tom and me and delicately looked away—I shuddered when I thought of what my brother and I would have had to endure had this been any other family.

Instead of a wretched abode we found a scantily furnished home that shone with cleanliness and smelled of spicy garden pinks. In its almost barren simplicity there was something comely.¹⁶ A few of the stands, chairs and tables had the intimate quality of what is fashioned by the human hand. These, together with odds and ends the family had brought from the old country and others resurrected from the town dump and mended, painted, waxed and polished, made for a kind of native household harmony. The house plants (no window was without several) delighted Mother. Mrs. Duvitch was raising little orange and lemon trees from seed and experimenting with a pineapple plant growing in a butter tub.

At once we were conscious of a remarkable difference in the demeanor of the family. The children, thrilled by their first party, by the family's first recognition in this country, kept showing their pleasure in wide delighted smiles. I couldn't believe they were the same timid downcast youngsters one met on the street and saw in school; they seemed to have been touched by a wand. The Duvitches' home was their castle: sustained and animated¹⁷ by the security of its four walls, shut away from a world of contempt and hostility, they were complete human beings. In their own house their true personalities emerged.

As the host Mr. Duvitch was a man we were seeing for the first time.

Overjoyed to have neighbors in his house, he was so full of himself that I was conscious of an invisible stature in him which made him seem quite as tall as Father. He beamed and feasted his eyes on us. Saying very little, he managed to make us feel a great deal and he constantly sought his wife's eyes with glances of delight over the wonder of what was happening.

David, the oldest boy, helped his father serve a bottle of homemade blackberry wine.

We ate fried fish and good food of the American picnic variety at a long plank table set out in the back yard under an apple tree. The young Duvitches passed things politely, never helping themselves first, and their thanks upon receiving a dish were almost ceremonial. They waited patiently for their plates and ate every scrap of food.

Father kept the conversation going. His every word was listened to, every childish eye riveted on him while he spoke.

Tom and I, fascinated by the family's metamorphosis, almost forgot about our blisters and our stings. As father told stories and jokes, we discovered that the Duvitches had a gift for gaiety, for laughter, all but extinguished but still capable of resurrection. They were merry people who had suffered too much. How strange to see the boys and

15

16. *Comely* (KUM lee) means pleasing and attractive.

17. *Sustained and animated* means supported and given life.

Word Bank

demeanor (dih MEEN ur) *n.*: conduct, behavior; facial appearance

metamorphosis (MET uh MOR FO siss) *n.*: a profound change

The Strangers That Came to Town / 65

LITERARY COMPONENTS

14. **Characterization:** The Duvitch family is distinguished by delicacy and discretion. Any other family would comment on the boys' appearance, but the Duvitches don't stare and don't comment. Instead, the Duvitches receive the boys and Father and Mother as if they were royalty.
15. **Characterization:** The boys are surprised to see the Duvitches are naturally happy people; their suffering in the past caused them to seem serious in public.

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

- Q. How are the Duvitches different during the family's visit?**
- A. They are smiling, animated, and their personalities emerge.

Analytical

- Q. Why are the Duvitches so different during the family's visit?**
- A. They seem to feel secure in their own home. They are thrilled to host their first party for their neighbors.



66 / Short Stories

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- Because the boys' parents are considered leaders in the community—based on their comparative wealth and education—once they socialize with the Duvitches, the rest of the community follows suit.
- Mother invites Mrs. Duvitch to a ladies' tea party, where Mrs. Duvitch impresses the ladies with her manners and her needlework.
- After a while, Mrs. Duvitch finds the courage to invite people into her home.
- The town's children stop teasing the Duvitch children and begin to play with them.

15 girls throw back their heads and laugh when Father said something that was funny, but not terribly funny.

After supper we were ushered to the open summer kitchen, the coolest room in the house, for entertainment.

David played folk songs on his accordion. Mr. Duvitch turned out to be an amateur ventriloquist; he made the dog Kasimar talk Polish, the cat Jan talk Russian and a doll named Sophia, talk English. Mrs. Duvitch read aloud to us, translating as she went along, a letter her mother had received from the great actress Modjeska, whom her family had known long ago.

I could tell that the Duvitches were a great revelation to Father and that he had enjoyed the evening tremendously.

16 "To think," he murmured as if talking to himself, while we were crossing the street, "that they should turn out to be gentle people of cultivation and accomplishment. Looked down on and ignored by their inferiors!"

I like to believe that the oil paintings of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson, which hung in our living room, helped to establish the Duvitches in our community. Even the fountain tinkling in the lily pool in our garden might have helped. In that town, oil paintings and flowing fountains were the symbols of wealth and aristocracy. Only a few mansions on Sycamore Hill were adorned with such.

Because our home was graced with these symbols, we had always been classified with the town's great, which gave us such prestige in the neighborhood that people often followed our lead. Obviously the Duvitches were important in Father's eyes, shown by the rigorous sentence he had imposed on Tom and me for our misuse of them. Added to that, we had recognized the

family by taking a meal with them in their own house. People, often persuaded to accept what we accepted, to believe what we believed, began to think the Duvitches must really count, after all. Most of our neighbors decided that if they were good enough for a highly educated man like Father (the only college graduate on Syringa Street), they were good enough for them. The galvanized community began to look upon things in a different light and it soon became the fashion to give the Duvitches the favorable nod.

Mother invited Mrs. Duvitch to a tea party, where her delicate manners, and the fine needlework which engaged her, won the approval of the local housewives who were present. On hot days our neighbor asked one of her big boys to carry the pineapple plant (which Mother had advertised well) into the back yard; and since botanical rarities were irresistible in that town of gardens, people were soon stopping by the fence for a look at the tropical specimen.

After a while Mrs. Duvitch found courage to ask these people into her house and, if Mr. Duvitch was at home, he told the visitors stories about life in the old country. It was then that the neighborhood learned about the family's European past.

The children ceased stopping their noses when Mr. Duvitch passed them by and it wasn't long before the young Duvitches were able to enjoy outside companionship when they found time to play. They blossomed out in school and they were soon shining in school plays and festivals. Even Kasimar began to

Word Bank **galvanized** (GAL vuh nyzd) v.: motivated

The Strangers That Came to Town / 67

LITERARY COMPONENTS

16. **Characterization:** Not only does Father characterize the Duvitches as "gentle people of cultivation and accomplishment," he characterizes the rest of the town as "their inferiors."

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

- Q. Which paintings hang in the living room of the boys' family?**
- A. There are oil paintings of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson.

Analytical

- Q. Oil paintings of Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson hang in the boys' living room. What are these paintings symbols of?**
- A. They are symbols of America—the American belief in democracy. They are also symbols of wealth and aristocracy. Owning such objects labels the family as "aristocracy."

SUMMING UP THE PLOT

- The whole Duvitch family becomes a valuable asset to the community.

LITERARY COMPONENTS

17. **Characterization:** The Duvitches have gained wisdom and acceptance from their suffering. Now others in the town benefit from their good qualities. The Duvitch elders counsel the townspeople in times of trouble.

take on the ways of an American dog, daring to bark and growl on occasion.

Nathan Duvitch, who was seventeen, could throw and hit a baseball as far as anybody his age in town. When I learned this, and let it be known, he was asked to join one of the local ball clubs. David, invited to play his accordion at a country dance, turned out to be a magician with the instrument and ended up being one of the community's most popular players. Mrs. Frithjof Kinsella gave One-eyed Manny an after-school job in her store and later on told Mother he was worth three boys put together.

The community presently had reason to be grateful for Mrs. Duvitch's presence. It turned out that she had a great gift for nursing, and no fear of death, no fear of disease, contagious or otherwise. In times of severe illness Dr. Switzer often suggested that she be sent for—her own girls could take over at home. There were almost no nurses in town and the nearest hospital was over a hundred miles away. When Mrs. Duvitch quietly slipped into a sickroom, she never failed to bring along a sedative influence, a kind of sanity. After an hour or two of her serene presence, the patient was calmed and comforted and the family reassured.

People began to turn to the Duvitches in all kinds of trouble. A boy who got in a bad scrape, a bitter family quarrel, a baby who had come into the world deformed—the elder Duvitches,

with their old-world wisdom and gift for accepting the inevitable, could sit by the hour and argue gently and convincingly against disgrace, false pride, grief, fear.

Most surprising of all, Mr. Duvitch, in one respect, turned out to be characteristically American. One Saturday afternoon when my ball team was playing Nathan's, Father met him in the local ball park.

"Chust like de American boy," Mr. Duvitch exploded when Nathan made a timely hit that drove in two runs. Our neighbor choked with pride and went on: "Nathan's battering averich three hunnert twenty-sevened!"

On a cold snowy afternoon in winter Mr. Duvitch stopped at our house and presented Father (who had enormous hands, much bigger than any of the Duvitches') with a handsome pair of leather mittens, lined with fur, which had a slightly acrid ashy odor.

"No doubt one of the boys resurrected them from a heap of ashes in the dump," remarked Father, drawing on the mittens, which fitted perfectly. "Why should I value them any the less? *Who* would have dreamed that the Duvitches would have so much more to offer us than we have to offer them?"

Word Bank

sedative (SED uh TIV) *adj.*: tending to calm or soothe
acrid (AK rid) *adj.*: bitter

17

GUIDING THE READING

Literal

- Q. How do the Duvitch children and parents gain acceptance in the community?**
- A. Nathan plays baseball, David plays the accordion at dances, and Manny works in a store. Mrs. Duvitch nurses the sick; Mr. and Mrs. Duvitch counsel people in times of trouble.

Analytical

- Q. What does Mr. Duvitch do that proves he is really Americanized?**
- A. He brags about his son's batting average, typical behavior for an American father.



The Strangers That Came to Town / 69

RECALLING

1. Their previous house was ruined by a hurricane.
2. They were foreigners, and the townspeople were suspicious of them. Also, they were poor, unappealing, and meek.
3. They put a bar of soap in the Duvitch bucket of fish, poisoning the fish and making them inedible.
4. Father was furious. Mr. Duvitch seemed resigned to life's difficulties.
5. They had to apologize and replace all the fish.
6. Once Father socialized with them and stood up for them, the rest of the community began to follow suit because Father and Mother were considered leaders in the community.

INTERPRETING

7. Answers will vary. Perhaps he had a greater understanding of the challenges they faced as newcomers in a strange country. Maybe he understood they didn't feel worthy of such attention.
8. The narrator hints at serious oppression in Europe that makes the teasing by some American children seem small in comparison.
9. Andy seemed to be proud he had persevered and done the honorable thing, even though he was forced into it by his father.
10. They emerged as talented, happy individuals in the security of their own home. The house was clean and smelled fresh; the furniture was sparse, but sturdy and polished. Their demeanor was unexpected by the family, and also—most likely—by the reader.
11. Mr. and Mrs. Duvitch gave advice to people of the community in times of trouble. Nathan Duvitch was an excellent baseball player, David Duvitch was a good accordion player, and Manny Duvitch worked hard in a store in town.

CONCLUDING

12. It's normal for people to want to feel positive about their behavior; therefore, people search for reasons to excuse their own wrongdoing.

Studying THE SELECTION

Recalling

1. What brought the Duvitches to the neighborhood?
2. Why didn't the Duvitch family have any friends?
3. What sort of prank did Tom and Andy play on the Duvitches?
4. How did Tom and Andy's father react to their prank? How did Mr. Duvitch react?
5. What was Tom and Andy's punishment?
6. What caused the neighborhood to finally accept the Duvitches?

Interpreting

7. Why do you think Father disagreed with Mother "when she remarked that she thought the Duvitches probably wished to be left alone"?
8. What does the narrator mean when he states, "their European travail made it easy for them to endure such a trifle as humiliation in America"?
9. After Tom and Andy came back to dry land after bringing in all the fish, "something in [Andy] was quietly rejoicing." What was Andy rejoicing about?
10. How did the Duvitches act within the confines of their own home? Describe the interior of the Duvitch home. Were their manners and their home what you would have expected?
11. Father remarks at the end of the story, "Who would have dreamed that the Duvitches would have so much more to offer us than we have to offer them?" In what ways did the Duvitches enrich their community?

Concluding

12. To "justify" means: to "provide good grounds or reasons for something." Why do people try to justify their behavior, even when they know that what they have done is wrong?

EXAMINING FICTION

1. The mischievous prank seemed to be the result of impulse. The boys just didn't think about the consequences of their action. They did not really want to hurt the Duvitch family. They just thought it would be funny.
2. We have seen that Father ran a household with strict rules. (For example: If the boys were sick and home from school, they were not allowed out-of-doors.) He was trying to raise sons who would become men of good character, who would respect other people and their property. The punishment was quite severe, but it fit the crime perfectly and certainly became a powerful lesson.

Examining Fiction

Understanding a character's motives gives you deeper understanding of a story. Think about the main characters in *The Strangers That Came to Town*.

1. What caused the boys to pull the prank on the Duvitches? Do you think it was out of malicious intent, or out of mischief?
2. What motivated Father to punish Tom and Andy the way he did? Do you think the punishment was too severe, or do you think the punishment was appropriate?

Thinking About Fiction

What motivates an individual? If you know that about a person, you must understand that person well. Usually, we look at a person's actions and come to certain conclusions about what motivated those actions. Writers of fiction often show us a character's actions and leave it to us to determine what the character's motivation is. It sometimes requires a lot of observing and thinking to figure out just what motivated a person to take certain action. Often, two observers will come to different conclusions about what someone's motives were in a certain situation.

1. What motivated the children of the town to ridicule the Duvitches?
2. What motivated Father to invite the Duvitches to dinner?
3. What motivated the community to finally accept the Duvitches? Frequently, people have mixed motives, some good, some selfish. Do any of the characters in the story have fixed motives?

Creating and Writing

Imagine that you are one of the Duvitches. Write a diary entry about what life was like for you, when you first moved to town. Describe how you felt starting in a new school and being treated in a demeaning way. Then write a second diary entry, describing life after having supper with your neighbors. Include details about how life began to change for the better.

THINKING ABOUT FICTION

1. The children are motivated by the desire to be like everybody else. Their parents have set the example of snubbing the Duvitches, and the children, like most human beings, have neither the will nor the principles to be different from the crowd.
2. Father is a highly principled person who is not swayed by public opinion. He is motivated by ideals like democracy, fairness, and kindness.
3. The community has mixed motives for accepting the Duvitches. They admire Father and wish to remain in his good graces. Remaining true to their "follow the crowd" mentality, once some of the crowd (motivated by Father) accept the Duvitches, the rest do, too. So one could say that the primary motivating factor of the community is social pressure. The members of the community also have some individual motives, many of them selfish. For example, those who need a nurse are happy to accept Mrs. Duvitch's expert ministrations. Nathan Duvitch's prowess at baseball is useful to the team, so he is accepted. Not to be too harsh a judge, one may add that, once the townspeople were prodded and pushed in the right direction, their better natures took over and they genuinely respected the Duvitches.

CREATING AND WRITING

Encourage students to include in their diary entries specific events (they can make them up) and their feelings and emotions following those events.

Most pages are omitted from this preview.

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GETTING STARTED

Ask the students to write a journal entry about a decision that didn't seem significant at the time but turned out to be important. Ask them to share their answers.

INTO *The Road Not Taken*

The theme, or message, of a poem is often very important, but sometimes the poem is written to explore a moment, a memory, or a feeling; the theme is secondary.

FOCUS

Frost's theme is that making a choice may not seem so important at the time. In looking back, however, we realize the importance of the decision. One must also keep in mind that refusing to choose is also a choice.

● Blueprint FOR READING

Into • *The Road Not Taken*

In reading poetry, the reader's biggest challenge may be understanding the poet's reason for writing the poem. The poet's purpose gives the poem its theme. Therefore, the poet always shares feelings and ideas that are inspiring, and to which the poet must give voice. It is this central message that is the **main idea**, or **theme**, of the poem. Without it, the poem would lack a reason to be.

Focus

The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost, is one of the best known and most beloved pieces of modern American poetry. The poem's popularity is surely because of Frost's skill, but its theme, which is slowly revealed to the reader, speaks to our hearts and minds. By the end of this important poem, hopefully you will grasp its meaning, and Frost's need to write the poem.

SUMMING UP THE POEM

- The speaker of the poem faced two paths in the woods and had to decide which one to take.
- Upon examining both, he took the one that seemed to show fewer signs of previous use, although they were almost the same.
- The speaker thought he might try the other path another day, although he realized that one doesn't often get the chance to start over again.
- The speaker says that even at the time the choice was made, he realized that he would tell the story over. Now, looking back, he realizes his choice has made all the difference.



The Road Not Taken

Robert Frost

Two roads diverged¹ in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
5 To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
10 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
15 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
20 And that has made all the difference.

1. *diverged* (DIH vurjd): went in different directions

The Road Not Taken / 311

LITERARY COMPONENTS

1. **Poetic Sound: Rhyme:** Each five-line stanza has the same rhyme scheme: the first, third, and fourth lines rhyme; the second and fifth lines rhyme.
2. **Poetic Sound: Rhythm:** Each line has nine syllables. Frost often follows a consistent, elaborate scheme of rhythm and rhyme, yet he makes his poem sound conversational, as if it just rolled off someone's tongue effortlessly, without forethought.
3. **Poetic Form: Stanza:** The poem is written in four five-line stanzas, each stanza functioning as a paragraph would in prose writing—each is a separate unit of thought.
4. **Figure of Speech: Symbolism:** The road not taken refers to all the possible choices in life that have not been pursued. The road less traveled probably represents a less common lifestyle, perhaps that of the artist.

although it is almost the same as the other. The differences are very slight.

In the third stanza, the speaker tells of his plan: he wants to take both paths; while choosing one, he plans to take the alternative another day. Even as he says this, he knows he will probably not return. It is mere talk; he is trying to reassure himself about a missed opportunity.

In the final stanza, the speaker makes his choice, yet he hints at a seemingly casual dilemma becoming a story to be retold in later years. He briefly restates the essence of the poem: there were two paths; he “took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” Although the reader has followed the speaker's logic in making a decision, the final line still surprises and gives the poem an unexpected depth. The choice seemed to be a simple one, between two almost equally attractive paths—as the expression goes, six of one, half dozen of another. Yet the speaker, now an old man, sighs over his choice; it has made all the difference. This last line gives the reader pause. It makes us think about all the choices treated so casually. Where might some of them have led?

ANALYZING THE POEM

The beauty of the poem lies in the apparent ease with which Frost employs elaborate rhyme and rhythm, treating sophisticated ideas, yet making it all sound so simple, as if anyone could have carried it off.

The first stanza lays out the basic idea of the poem—the speaker has a decision to make, and he wishes he could “travel both”—have it both ways and still be the same person. He takes time to look over

the possibilities; this is a well-considered decision, one not lightly made.

In the second stanza, he names his choices. The road that was “grassy and wanted wear” symbolizes the less popular, less traveled path in life. For example, in the choice of a career, the road less traveled might represent choosing to be a poet while the more traveled road might represent being a lawyer or accountant. His choice: he chooses the road less worn,

RECALLING

1. The setting of the poem is the woods.
2. The speaker of the poem is faced with two roads—a fork in the road—and has to decide which path to take.
3. The speaker of the poem chooses the path less traveled.
4. His choice of a path has made all the difference.

INTERPRETING

5. The one he chose seemed to be less frequently used. The grass did not look “trodden back.”
6. He would like to walk the other path another day, but he knows he probably will not pass this same way again.
7. The two roads represent two possible paths in life. They can represent any important choice where there are two possibilities. The suggested theme is that traveling the path less traveled, making the less popular choice, can make all the difference in one’s life.

CONCLUDING

8. Answers will vary.

EXAMINING POETRY

The road that was “grassy and wanted wear” symbolizes the less popular, less traveled path in life. For example, in the choice of a career, the road less traveled might represent choosing to be a poet while the more traveled road might represent being a salesman, lawyer, or accountant.

CREATING AND WRITING

Answers will vary.

Studying THE SELECTION

• *The Road Not Taken*

Recalling

1. Describe the setting of the poem.
2. What decision was the speaker faced with?
3. Which road does the speaker choose?
4. What is the meaning of the speaker’s final statement?

Interpreting

5. Why did the speaker choose one road and not the other? Explain what the speaker means.
6. What does Frost mean in Lines 13-15?
7. What do the two roads symbolize? What is the theme of the poem?

Concluding

8. Have you ever had to make a difficult choice? What did your decision concern? Why did you make the choice you did?

Examining Poetry

Reread the Frost selection, and concentrate on the symbolism in the poem. Remember, a **symbol** is one thing that represents something else. For example, the American flag is a symbol of national pride and patriotism. In literature the appearance of dark clouds, lightning, and thunder is often used as an indication that something bad is about to happen. Symbols may be suggestive of future events.

What was symbolic about the speaker taking the road that “was grassy and wanted wear”?

Creating and Writing

Look back at your answer to question 8. Think again about the choice you made. Now think about the choice that the speaker made in *The Road Not Taken*. Try to write your own poem about important choices.