



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What can one generation learn from another?

People from different generations sometimes have very different ways of looking at the world. For your final reading selection in this unit, you will choose one additional text about generations. Follow these steps to help you choose.

Look Back Think about the selections you have already read. What more do you want to know about the topic of generations?

Look Ahead Preview the selections by reading the descriptions. Which one seems most interesting and appealing to you?

Look Inside Take a few minutes to scan through the text you chose. Make another selection if this text doesn't meet your needs.

Independent Learning Strategies

Throughout your life, in school, in your community, and in your career, you will need to rely on yourself to learn and work on your own. Review these strategies and the actions you can take to practice them during Independent Learning. Add ideas of your own for each category.

STRATEGY	ACTION PLAN
Create a schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a plan for what to do each day.• Understand your goals and deadlines.•
Practice what you've learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use first-read and close-read strategies to deepen your understanding.• Evaluate the usefulness of the evidence to help you understand the topic.• Consider the quality and reliability of the source.•
Take notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Record important ideas and information.• Review notes before preparing to share with a group.•

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Choose one selection. Selections are available online only.

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Sophie Johnson

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BLOG POST

Bridging the Generational Divide Between a Football Father and a Soccer Son John McCormick

How do a father and son find common ground in a disagreement?

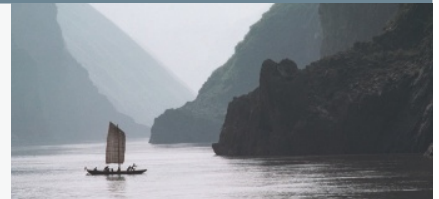


SHORT STORY

Water Names

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SHORT STORY

An Hour With Abuelo

Judith Ortiz Cofer

An old man can still surprise his grandson.



PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT PREP

Review Evidence for a Nonfiction Narrative

Complete your Evidence Log for the unit by evaluating what you've learned and synthesizing the information you've recorded.



First-Read Guide



Tool Kit

First-Read Guide and
Model Annotation

Use this page to record your first-read ideas.

Selection Title: _____

NOTICE

NOTICE new information or ideas you learn about the unit topic as you first read this text.

ANNOTATE

ANNOTATE by marking vocabulary and key passages you want to revisit.



CONNECT ideas within the selection to other knowledge and the selections you have read.

RESPOND by writing a brief summary of the selection.

CONNECT

RESPOND

STANDARD

Reading Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Close-Read Guide



Tool Kit

Close-Read Guide and
Model Annotation

Use this page to record your close-read ideas.

Selection Title: _____

Textual Evidence

Annotate • Question • Conclude

Revisit sections of the text you marked during your first read. Read the sections closely and annotate what you notice. Ask yourself questions about the text. What can you conclude? Write your ideas.



Focus on Big Ideas

Think about the author's choice of patterns, structure, techniques, and ideas included in the text. Select one and record your thoughts about what this choice conveys.

QuickWrite

Pick a paragraph from the text that grabbed your interest. Explain the power of this passage.

STANDARD

Reading Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Lineage

Margaret Walker



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About the Poet



Poet and novelist **Margaret Walker** (1915–1998) was born in Birmingham, Alabama, daughter of a minister and a music teacher who nurtured her interest in poetry and philosophy. At the age of 19, Walker graduated from Northwestern University and began a career as a writer. In addition to earning a master of arts in 1940 and a PhD in 1965, Walker received numerous honorary degrees and fellowships in recognition of her literary contributions.

BACKGROUND

For Margaret Walker, her family history was her greatest source of inspiration. Her grandmother took care of Walker and her siblings as children and told them stories about their great-grandmother. Walker's 500-page epic novel, *Jubilee*, was based on her great-grandmother's life during slavery and immediately following the Civil War.

NOTES

My grandmothers were strong.
They followed plows and bent to toil.¹
They moved through fields sowing seed.
They touched earth and grain grew.
5 They were full of sturdiness and singing.
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay
With veins² rolling roughly over quick hands
10 They have many clean words to say.
My grandmothers were strong.
Why am I not as they?

1. **toil** *n.* hard physical work.

2. **veins** *n.* vessels that carry blood to the heart.

Family

Grace Paley

About the Poet



Grace Paley (1922–2007) was raised in the Bronx, in New York City. Her parents spoke both Russian and Yiddish, and this dual culture as well as the city itself inspired many of her writings. She described herself as a “combative pacifist” and spoke out against American militarization in anti-war protests. Paley taught writing at Sarah Lawrence College for many years, and her work has won many awards.

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BACKGROUND

Paley's family immigrated to America from Russia during the Russian Revolution of 1905. During this period, many Russians had become dissatisfied with the social and political system of their country. Protestors were initially met with violent resistance by the government, but continued unrest eventually convinced Tsar Nicholas II to institute the Fundamental Laws, which functioned as a constitution.

My father was brilliant embarrassed funny handsome
my mother was plain serious principled¹ kind
my grandmother was intelligent lonesome for her
 other life her dead children silent
5 my aunt was beautiful bitter angry loving

I fell among these adjectives in earliest childhood
and was nearly buried with opportunity
some of them stuck to me others
finding me American and smooth slipped away

1. **principled** *adj.* moral; knowing right from wrong.

NOTES

"Gotcha Day" Isn't a Cause for Celebration

Sophie Johnson



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About the Author



Sophie Johnson was a junior at Malibu High School in Malibu, California, when she wrote and published this article. She has written several articles for the *Huffington Post*.

BACKGROUND

Between 1999 and 2013, United States families adopted over 200,000 children from overseas, including 70,000 children from China. Most children are less than two years old when adopted, but many are older, and have some memories of life in their birth country. In this piece, an author reflects on the mixed emotions she has about her own "Gotcha Day," the day she was adopted.

NOTES

- 1 **I** was five and a half years old when my parents adopted me in China and brought me to my new home to America. As my mom always says, I eagerly ran into her arms and truly have stayed there for the past 12 years. She is my mom, my best friend, the woman I admire most in the world. But for the longest time, my family marked that day we met in China as something known in adoption circles as "Gotcha Day."
- 2 Lots of families celebrate the day they met their adopted child and became a family. But while I appreciate the love and everything else my parents give me, Gotcha Day can be a mixed bag—one that leaves kids like me sad and confused. What's missing from Gotcha Day is this: The acknowledgement that adoption is also about loss.
- 3 While adoptive parents may be celebrating a long-awaited child finally entering their lives, that child in their arms has experienced

abandonment or has been surrendered for reasons they may never know or understand. It's a lot to process. And sometimes while adopted kids are processing it, their feelings of loss override their feelings of happiness. Gotcha Day is one of those times when we think about our past and how little some of us actually know about it. We think about our biological parents and wish we knew them and could ask them why they didn't keep us. We think about what our lives would be like, where would we be, what our futures would look like, had there been no Gotcha Day.

- 4 It's been said that adoption loss is the only trauma in the world where everyone expects the victims to be grateful and appreciative. I am grateful and appreciative, but I also want to remind people that someone's happiness over building their family through adoption may also be someone else's sorrow over losing their child for circumstances they couldn't control. Gotcha Day feels like a day of fake smiles if we don't acknowledge that it's also about loss, not just gain.
- 5 In my family, we now celebrate Family Day. My parents show my brother and me the photos of when we first met. We talk about how she fed me a big bag of candy that I promptly threw up on her in the cab ride back to the hotel. I tell her every Family Day how she shouldn't have let our guide throw away the yellow sweatshirt that I vomited on. It was the last thing my orphanage caregivers dressed me in and was a tangible part of a past that has many unknowns. (I forgive her; she was jet-lagged¹ and the guide took away the dirty clothes and just put them in the trash knowing my mom had a suitcase full of new things for me to wear from America.)
- 6 Every Family Day, we laugh about my little brother's Elvis² sneer and bewilderment at the events of the day we got him. We laugh about how—I was 7 at the time and had been living in America for two years—I took one look at him and began asking my mom if we could get a puppy instead. We remember how while my parents were busy filling out paperwork and he and I sat coloring and my dad threw a ball at his head. My mom screamed and my brother, without even looking up from his coloring, raised his left hand and caught the pitch perfectly. "A leftie! Yes!!" shouted out my dad, a life-long Cubs³ fan. I'm not sure if the Chinese officials thought it was funny, but we sure laugh about it every Family Day.
- 7 I love our Family Day. It celebrates our love for one another plain and simple. And we always end it by lighting a candle for our first families and going outside to talk to the moon. 🌕

1. **jet-lagged** *adj.* exhausted from long-distance travel.

2. **Elvis** Elvis Presley, wildly popular singer and actor, also known for his smiling sneer.

3. **Cubs** Major League Baseball team of Chicago.

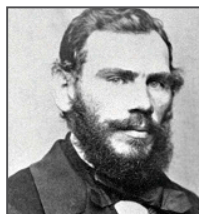
The Grandfather and His Little Grandson

Leo Tolstoy



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About the Author



Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) was born into a wealthy family in Russia and inherited the family estate. By the time he was fifty, he had written some of the world's most famous novels. In midlife, Tolstoy began to reject his life of luxury. He surrendered the rights to many of his works and gave his property to his family. This world-famous writer died alone in a remote train station in Russia.

BACKGROUND

"The Grandfather and His Little Grandson" is originally a German fairy tale collected by the Brothers Grimm, and first published in 1812. Many writers, including Leo Tolstoy, have retold different versions of this story over time.

NOTES

- 1 **T**he grandfather had become very old. His legs would not carry him, his eyes could not see, his ears could not hear, and he was toothless. And when he ate, he was untidy. His son and the son's wife no longer allowed him to eat with them at the table and had him take his meals near the stove. They gave him his food in a cup. Once he tried to move the cup closer to him and it fell to the floor and broke. The daughter-in-law scolded the old man, saying that he damaged everything around the house and broke their cups, and she warned him that from that day on she would give him his food in a wooden dish. The old man sighed and said nothing.
- 2 One day the old man's son and his wife were sitting in their hut, resting. Their little son was playing on the floor. He was putting together something out of small bits of wood. His father asked him: "What are you making, Misha?" And Misha said: "I'm

making a wooden bucket. When you and Mommie get old, I'll feed you out of this wooden bucket."

- 3 The young peasant and his wife looked at each other and tears appeared in their eyes. They were ashamed to have treated the old man so unkindly, and from that day they again ate with him at the table and took better care of him. 🐼

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NOTES

Bridging the Generational Divide Between a Football Father and a Soccer Son

John McCormick



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About the Author

John McCormick is a blogger, author, and regular contributor to the *Huffington Post's* Parents Section, where he provides insights and advice to fellow parents. McCormick is also a speaker, frequently visiting schools, fairs, and libraries to advocate for storytelling.

BACKGROUND

American football originates from the sports of soccer and rugby. According to many metrics, it is the most popular sport in America. But it is soccer (known as *football* in most countries besides the United States) that reigns as the most popular sport across the globe. The World Cup is among the most-watched sporting events in the world. Today, soccer has gained popularity in the United States as well.

NOTES

- 1 **N**owhere is the generation gap between my 16-year-old son Will and me wider than when it comes to football. Football, for me, is that most American of sports, pitting helmeted warriors colliding with one another across the line of scrimmage¹. Football for Will is of the global variety, the “beautiful sport” consisting of touch passes and bending corner kicks, commonly referred to on this side of the Atlantic as soccer.
- 2 Will plays on his high school’s JV soccer team. Last weekend, he invited a few of his teammates for a sleepover at our home after their Friday night game. The next morning, Will and his teammates gathered around the television to watch an English Premier League soccer game. Comparing players on their respective fantasy soccer teams, they rattled off the names

1. **line of scrimmage** imaginary line used at the beginning of play to separate two football teams.

of players I'd never heard of . . . Mesut Özil, Yaya Touré and Mathieu Flamini, to name just a few.

3 While impressed with their knowledge of EPL players, I wondered how many professional football players they could identify, so I asked them to name as many players they could from the National Football League.

4 The first five were easy for the boys—"RGIII, Peyton Manning, Drew Brees, Joe Flacco, Richard Sherman."

5 An awkward pause ensued before another boy finally piped up with "Ray Rice." I groaned.

6 When my son and his friends finally bogged down at eight, I asked, "Why do you know so much about soccer but so little about football?"

7 The gauntlet had been thrown down, and my son quickly took up the challenge. "Soccer is way more fun to watch and play than football," he said. "There are so many commercial timeouts during football games on TV that you can die of old age waiting for play to resume."

8 I had to give him that one. While I had lost one battle, I wasn't about to concede the war. I told him that football had more offense, and that watching scoreless soccer games for ninety minutes was as dry as watching C-Span² with the volume off.

9 Back and forth the arguments flew like headers³ on a soccer pitch.

10 *Will:* Soccer is followed by millions more fans than football and is the most popular sport in the world.

11 *Dad:* The 2014 Super Bowl is still the most watched in U.S. TV history.

12 *Will:* Soccer is a more fluid⁴ game, requiring skill, endurance and grace.

13 *Dad:* Football has all that, too, but the players don't act like they've been mortally wounded every time an opposing player brushes against them!

14 *Will:* Soccer enthusiasts are the most passionate fans in the world, singing songs and standing on their feet for entire matches.

15 *Dad:* Ever been to a Seahawks game in Seattle or a Broncos game in Denver?

16 My son got in the last word. "Soccer is a sport whose time has come. It's the sport of *my* generation."

17 I suddenly remembered a conversation I had with my own father when I was my son's age. My father, the starting catcher on his college baseball team, spoke passionately of why baseball is,

2. **C-Span** television network that broadcasts political proceedings and other public affairs programming.

3. **headers** *n.* shots or passes in soccer made by hitting the ball with the head.

4. **fluid** *adj.* showing a smooth, easy style.

and always will be, America's national pastime. I argued just as fervently that football was now America's national game.

I even recall telling my dad that football was a sport whose time had come.

18 Every generation has its own collective character, its likes and dislikes, its passions and indifferences. While baseball was tops in my dad's day and football in mine, many youth today are embracing soccer as the new "in" sport. Maybe it's time for me to take a new perspective on "the beautiful game."

19 My son and I came up with a compromise. I watch an EPL game with my son on Saturday mornings and he watches an NFL game with me on Sunday afternoons. Not only do we have the chance to spend more time together, but we teach each other the finer points of futbol vs. football. Along the way we even discovered that football is derived from soccer, with rugby providing the missing link. Who knew that both sports were in the same family? Just like in ours. 🐾

Water Names

Lan Samantha Chang

About the Author



Writer and novelist **Lan Samantha Chang** (b. 1965) grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin, learning about China from her Chinese immigrant parents. She has received many awards, including a 2008 Guggenheim Fellowship. Chang is currently the director of the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop.

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BACKGROUND

The Yangtze River is one of the longest rivers in the world, flowing 3,915 miles across China, and emptying out into the East China Sea. Throughout Chinese history, the Yangtze River has been a vital source of life, providing food and enabling irrigation, transportation, and industry. Yangtze is the river's westernized name - in China it is called Chang Jiang, meaning "Long River."

¹ **S**ummertime at dusk we'd gather on the back porch, tired and sticky from another day of fierce encoded quarrels, nursing our mosquito bites and frail dignities, sisters in name only. At first we'd pinch and slap each other, fighting for the best—least ragged—folding chair. Then we'd argue over who would sit next to our grandmother. We were so close together on the tiny porch that we often pulled our own hair by mistake. Forbidden to bite, we planted silent toothmarks on each others' wrists. We ignored the bulk of house behind us, the yard, the fields, the darkening sky. We even forgot about our grandmother. Then suddenly we'd hear her old, dry voice, very close, almost on the backs of our necks.

² "Xiushila! Shame on you. Fighting like a bunch of chickens."

NOTES

- 3 And Ingrid, the oldest, would freeze with her thumb and forefinger right on the back of Lily's arm. I would slide my hand away from the end of Ingrid's braid. Ashamed, we would shuffle our feet while Waipuo calmly found her chair.
- 4 On some nights she sat with us in silence. But on some nights she told us stories, "just to keep up your Chinese," she said.
- 5 "In these prairie crickets I often hear the sound of rippling water, of the Yangtze River," she said. "Granddaughters, you are descended on both sides from people of the water country, near the mouth of the great Chang Jiang as it is called, where the river is so grand and broad that even on clear days you can scarcely see the other side.
- 6 "The Chang Jiang runs four thousand miles, originating in the Himalaya mountains¹ where it crashes, flecked with gold dust, down steep cliffs so perilous and remote that few humans have ever seen them. In central China, the river squeezes through deep gorges, then widens in its last thousand miles to the sea. Our ancestors have lived near the mouth of this river, the ever-changing delta, near a city called Nanjing, for more than a thousand years."
- 7 "A thousand years," murmured Lily, who was only ten. When she was younger she had sometimes burst into nervous crying at the thought of so many years. Her small insistent fingers grabbed my fingers in the dark.
- 8 "Through your mother and I you are descended from a line of great men and women. We have survived countless floods and seasons of ill-fortune because we have the spirit of the river in us. Unlike mountains, we cannot be powdered down or broken apart. Instead, we run together like raindrops. Our strength and spirit wear down mountains into sand. But even our people must respect the water."
- 9 She paused. "When I was young, my own grandmother once told me the story of Wen Zhiqing's daughter. Twelve hundred years ago the civilized parts of China still lay to the north, and the Yangtze valley lay unspoiled. In those days lived an ancestor named Wen Zhiqing, a resourceful man, and proud. He had been fishing for many years with trained cormorants, which you girls of course have never seen. Cormorants are sleek, black birds with long, bending necks which the fishermen fitted with metal rings so the fish they caught could not be swallowed. The birds would perch on the side of the old wooden boat and dive into the river." We had only known blue swimming pools, but we tried to imagine the sudden shock of cold and the plunge, deep into water.
- 10 "Now, Wen Zhiqing had a favorite daughter who was very beautiful and loved the river. She would beg to go out on the boat

1. **Himalaya Mountains** mountain range in South Asia.

with him. This daughter was a restless one, never contented with their catch, and often she insisted they stay out until it was almost dark. Even then, she was not satisfied. She had been spoiled by her father, kept protected from the river, so she could not see its danger. To this young woman, the river was as familiar as the sky. It was a bright, broad road stretching out to curious lands. She did not fully understand the river's depths.

- 11 "One clear spring evening, as she watched the last bird dive off into the blackening waters, she said, 'If only this catch would bring back something more than another fish!'
- 12 "She leaned over the side of the boat and looked at the water. The stars and moon reflected back at her. And it is said that the spirits living underneath the water looked up at her as well. And the spirit of a young man who had drowned in the river many years before saw her lovely face."
- 13 We had heard about the ghosts of the drowned, who wait forever in the water for a living person to pull down instead. A faint breeze moved through the mosquito screens and we shivered.
- 14 "The cormorant was gone for a very long time." Waipuo said, "so long that the fisherman grew puzzled. Then, suddenly, the bird emerged from the waters, almost invisible in the night. Wen Zhiqing grasped his catch, a very large fish, and guided the boat back to shore. And when Wen reached home, he gutted the fish and discovered, in its stomach, a valuable pearl ring."
- 15 "From the man?" said Lily.
- 16 "Sshh, she'll tell you."
- 17 Waipuo ignored us. "His daughter was delighted that her wish had been fulfilled. What most excited her was the idea of an entire world like this, a world where such a beautiful ring would be only a bauble!² For part of her had always longed to see far away things and places. The river had put a spell on her heart. In the evenings she began to sit on the bank looking at her own reflection in the water. Sometimes she said she saw a handsome young man looking back at her. And her yearning for him filled her heart with sorrow and fear, for she knew that she would soon leave her beloved family.
- 18 "'It's just the moon, said Wen Zhiqing, but his daughter shook her head. 'There's a kingdom under the water,' she said. 'The prince is asking me to marry him. He sent the ring as an offering to you.' 'Nonsense,' said her father, and he forbade her to sit by the water again.
- 19 "For a year things went as usual, but the next spring there came a terrible flood that swept away almost everything. In the middle of a torrential rain, the family noticed that the daughter was

2. **bauble** (BAW buhl) *n.* object of little value.

missing. She had taken advantage of the confusion to hurry to the river and visit her beloved. The family searched for days but they never found her."

20 Her smoky, rattling voice came to a stop.

21 "What happened to her?" Lily said.

22 "It's okay, stupid," I told her. She was so beautiful that she went to join the kingdom of her beloved. Right?

23 "Who knows?" Waipuo said. "They say she was seduced by a water ghost. Or perhaps she lost her mind to desiring."

24 "What do you mean?" asked Ingrid.

25 "I'm going inside," Waipuo said, and got out of her chair with a creak. A moment later the light went on in her bedroom window. We knew she stood before the mirror, combing out her long, wavy silver-gray hair, and we imagined that in her youth she too had been beautiful.

26 We sat together without talking. We had gotten used to Waipuo's abruptness, her habit of creating a question and leaving without answering it, as if she were disappointed in the question itself. We tried to imagine Wen Zhiqing's daughter. What did she look like? How old was she? Why hadn't anyone remembered her name?

27 While we weren't watching, the stars had emerged. Their brilliant pinpoints mapped the heavens. They glittered over us, over Waipuo in her room, the house, and the small city we lived in, the great waves of grass that ran for miles around us, the ground beneath as dry and hard as bone. 🌟

An Hour With Abuelo

Judith Ortiz Cofer

About the Author

Judith Ortiz Cofer (1952–2016) was born in Puerto Rico. She grew up in both Puerto Rico and New Jersey, where her father was stationed in the United States Navy. She was introduced to the storytelling tradition at her grandmother's house in Puerto Rico.



BACKGROUND

Nursing homes are places that provide care for people who are unable to care for themselves because of chronic illness or disability. Usually, nursing home residents are elderly. A staff of nurses and aides provides medicine and food so that residents are free to spend their time doing other things.

- 1 “Just one hour, *una hora*, is all I’m asking of you, son.” My grandfather is in a nursing home in Brooklyn, and my mother wants me to spend some time with him, since the doctors say that he doesn’t have too long to go now. I don’t have much time left of my summer vacation, and there’s a stack of books next to my bed I’ve got to read if I’m going to get into the AP English class I want. I’m going stupid in some of my classes, and Mr. Williams, the principal at Central, said that if I passed some reading tests, he’d let me move up.
- 2 Besides, I hate the place, the old people’s home, especially the way it smells like industrial-strength ammonia¹ and other stuff I won’t mention, since it turns my stomach. And really the abuelo always has a lot of relatives visiting him, so I’ve gotten out of going out there except at Christmas, when a whole vanload of grandchildren are herded over there to give him gifts and a hug. We all make it quick and spend the rest of the time in the

NOTES

1. **ammonia** *n.* liquid used for cleaning that has a very strong smell.

recreation area, where they play checkers and stuff with some of the old people's games, and I catch up on back issues of *Modern Maturity*. I'm not picky, I'll read almost anything.

3 Anyway, after my mother nags me for about a week, I let her drive me to Golden Years. She drops me off in front. She wants me to go in alone and have a "good time" talking to Abuelo. I tell her to be back in one hour or I'll take the bus back to Paterson. She squeezes my hand and says, "*Gracias, hijo*,"² in a choked-up voice like I'm doing her a big favor.

4 I get depressed the minute I walk into the place. They line up the old people in wheelchairs in the hallway as if they were about to be raced to the finish line by orderlies³ who don't even look at them when they push them here and there. I walk fast to room 10, Abuelo's "suite." He is sitting up in his bed writing with a pencil in one of those old-fashioned black hardback notebooks. It has the outline of the island of Puerto Rico on it. I slide into the hard vinyl chair by his bed. He sort of smiles and the lines on his face get deeper, but he doesn't say anything. Since I'm supposed to talk to him, I say, "What are you doing, Abuelo, writing the story of your life?"

5 It's supposed to be a joke, but he answers, "Sí, how did you know, Arturo?"

6 His name is Arturo too. I was named after him. I don't really know my grandfather. His children, including my mother, came to New York and New Jersey (where I was born) and he stayed on the Island until my grandmother died. Then he got sick, and since nobody could leave their jobs to go take care of him, they brought him to this nursing home in Brooklyn. I see him a couple of times a year, but he's always surrounded by his sons and daughters. My mother tells me that Don Arturo had once been a teacher back in Puerto Rico, but had lost his job after the war. Then he became a farmer. She's always saying in a sad voice, "Ay, bendito!"⁴ What a waste of a fine mind." Then she usually shrugs her shoulders and says, "Así es la vida." That's the way life is. It sometimes makes me mad that the adults I know just accept whatever is thrown at them because "that's the way things are." Not for me. I go after what I want.

7 Anyway, Abuelo is looking at me like he was trying to see into my head, but he doesn't say anything. Since I like stories, I decide I may as well ask him if he'll read me what he wrote.

8 I look at my watch; I've already used up twenty minutes of the hour I promised my mother.

2. **Gracias, hijo** (GRAH see uhs EE ho) Spanish for "Thank you, son." *Hijo* also means "child."

3. **orderlies** *n.* hospital workers who do nonmedical tasks such as moving patients around or cleaning.

4. **bendito** (vehn DEE toh) Spanish for "blessed."

- 9 Abuelo starts talking in his slow way. He speaks what my mother calls book English. He taught himself from a dictionary, and his words sound stiff, like he's sounding them out in his head before he says them. With his children he speaks Spanish, and that funny book English with us grandchildren. I'm surprised that he's still so sharp, because his body is shrinking like a crumpled-up brown paper sack with some bones in it. But I can see from looking into his eyes that the light is still on in there.
- 10 "It is a short story, Arturo. The story of my life. It will not take very much time to read it."
- 11 "I have time, Abuelo." I'm a little embarrassed that he saw me looking at my watch.
- 12 "Yes, *hijo*. You have spoken the truth. *La verdad*. You have much time."
- 13 Abuelo reads: "I loved words from the beginning of my life. In the campo⁵ where I was born one of seven sons, there were few books. My mother read them to us over and over: the Bible, the stories of Spanish conquistadors and of pirates that she had read as a child and brought with her from the city of Mayagüez; that was before she married my father, a coffee bean farmer; and she taught us words from the newspaper that a boy on a horse brought every week to her. She taught each of us how to write on

5. **campo** (KAHM poh) Spanish for "open country."



a slate with chalks that she ordered by mail every year. We used those chalks until they were so small that you lost them between your fingers.

14 “I always wanted to be a writer and a teacher. With my heart and my soul I knew that I wanted to be around books all of my life. And so against the wishes of my father, who wanted all his sons to help him on the land, she sent me to high school in Mayagüez. For four years I boarded with a couple she knew. I paid my rent in labor, and I ate vegetables I grew myself. I wore my clothes until they were thin as parchment. But I graduated at the top of my class! My whole family came to see me that day. My mother brought me a beautiful *guayabera*, a white shirt made of the finest cotton and embroidered by her own hands. I was a happy young man.

15 “In those days you could teach in a country school with a high school diploma. So I went back to my mountain village and got a job teaching all grades in a little classroom built by the parents of my students.

16 “I had books sent to me by the government. I felt like a rich man although the pay was very small. I had books. All the books I wanted! I taught my students how to read poetry and plays, and how to write them. We made up songs and put on shows for the parents. It was a beautiful time for me.

17 “Then the war came,⁶ and the American President said that all Puerto Rican men would be drafted. I wrote to our governor and explained that I was the only teacher in the mountain village. I told him that the children would go back to the fields and grow up ignorant if I could not teach them their letters. I said that I thought I was a better teacher than a soldier. The governor did not answer my letter. I went into the U.S. Army.

18 “I told my sergeant that I could be a teacher in the army. I could teach all the farm boys their letters so that they could read the instructions on the ammunition boxes and not blow themselves up. The sergeant said I was too smart for my own good, and gave me a job cleaning latrines.⁷ He said to me there is reading material for you there, scholar. Read the writing on the walls. I spent the war mopping floors and cleaning toilets.

19 “When I came back to the Island, things had changed. You had to have a college degree to teach school, even the lower grades. My parents were sick, two of my brothers had been killed in the war, the others had stayed in Nueva York. I was the only one left to help the old people. I became a farmer. I married a good

6. “Then the war came, . . .” The United States entered World War II in 1941, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

7. **latrines** (luh TREENZ) *n.* toilets.

woman who gave me many good children. I taught them all how to read and write before they started school.”

20 Abuelo then puts the notebook down on his lap and closes his eyes.

21 “*Así es la vida* is the title of my book,” he says in a whisper, almost to himself. Maybe he’s forgotten that I’m there.

22 For a long time he doesn’t say anything else. I think that he’s sleeping, but then I see that he’s watching me through half-closed lids, maybe waiting for my opinion of his writing. I’m trying to think of something nice to say. I liked it and all, but not the title. And I think that he could’ve been a teacher if he had wanted to bad enough. Nobody is going to stop me from doing what I want with my life. I’m not going to let *la vida* get in my way. I want to discuss this with him, but the words are not coming into my head in Spanish just yet. I’m about to ask him why he didn’t keep fighting to make his dream come true, when an old lady in hot-pink running shoes sort of appears at the door.

23 She is wearing a pink jogging outfit too. The world’s oldest marathoner, I say to myself. She calls out to my grandfather in a flirty voice, “Yoo-hoo, Arturo, remember what day this is? It’s poetry-reading day in the rec room! You promised us you’d read your new one today.”

24 I see my abuelo perking up almost immediately. He points to his wheelchair, which is hanging like a huge metal bat in the open closet. He makes it obvious that he wants me to get it. I put it together, and with Mrs. Pink Running Shoes’s help, we get him in it. Then he says in a strong deep voice I hardly recognize, “Arturo, get that notebook from the table, please.”

25 I hand him another map-of-the-Island notebook—this one is red. On it in big letters it says, *POEMAS DE ARTURO*.

26 I start to push him toward the rec room, but he shakes his finger at me.

27 “Arturo, look at your watch now. I believe your time is over.” He gives me a wicked smile.

28 Then with her pushing the wheelchair—maybe a little too fast—they roll down the hall. He is already reading from his notebook, and she’s making bird noises. I look at my watch and the hour *is* up, to the minute. I can’t help but think that my abuelo has been timing me. It cracks *me* up. I walk slowly down the hall toward the exit sign. I want my mother to have to wait a little. I don’t want her to think that I’m in a hurry or anything. 🐼

NOTES