

Reading Passages: 9th Grade

The Friendship

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

1. The little boy had a policeman for a friend. He acquired him out of a clear sky. He ran out of the schoolyard to go home for his noon lunch, tripped over a rough spot on the sidewalk, and fell so hard and so flat that for gasping moments he could not draw a breath. The policeman happened to be passing by. Robert felt himself being lifted and pounded on the back. The first breath that came was agony and wonder, for drawing it had seemed impossible. It was only with the third that he realized his knees were hurting, and he looked down to see them torn and bleeding. He became aware of the policeman and then it was unthinkable to cry.
2. He was not afraid, like the defiant older boys who gave themselves away by bragging of what they had done and intended to do to policemen. His father had often told him that the law was a protector, and if he ever found himself lost, for he was something of a roamer, he was to ask for a policeman and give his name and address. This seemed appropriate now.
3. He said, "My name is Robert Wilkinson and I live on Newton Street. I've forgotten the number."
4. The policeman nodded his head gravely. "I know your father," he said. "Isn't your house the large green-and-white one?"
5. "Oh, yes. With a big snow-apple tree in the yard."
6. The policeman again inclined his head. "My duties take me that way, Robert. I'll walk along with you."
7. The little boy was enchanted. The policeman's gravity was pleasing and complimentary.
8. "That was a bad tumble, young man. Are your knees painful?"
9. "Yes, sir, they hurt terribly."
10. "Will there be someone at home to fix you up?"
11. "Oh, yes; my mother. She's always there when I come home for lunch."
12. "You're lucky, Robert. I didn't have a mother when I was your age. Eight, I'd guess?"
13. "Just six. I almost wasn't old enough to begin the first grade." He glowed with pride that the policeman thought he was eight years old. "I thought everybody had a mother."
14. "Everybody has a mother to begin with."
15. "Even kittens and puppies and little birds."
16. "And colts and calves and baby elephants," said the policeman, and smiled. "But sometimes a mother can be lost."

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17. Robert was puzzled. "I thought only little boys got lost. I never have been, quite, but my father says he's always expecting it."
18. "Just ask for me if you're lost. I am Sergeant Masters."
19. "That's what my father told me, to ask for a policeman and tell my name and where I live. But I can't ever remember the number."
20. "The name and the street are what matter. Your father is well known in the area where you would presumably stray."
21. Robert did not quite understand all the words, but he was charmed with the truly adult conversation, with his father's being well known, and above all with the policeman. He sighed happily, and when the policeman took his hand in crossing a street, his cup of joy ran over, and he left his small hand inside the vast one. They walked in silence down another block.
22. He asked, "Do you have a little boy?"
23. "No, Robert. I should have liked a dozen, but I shall never have a single one."
24. "How can you tell?"
25. "Sometimes," the policeman said, "it is possible to know."
26. The sergeant at once took third place in omniscience behind God and his father, and it occurred to Robert that perhaps he should put him first. The only flaw in everything was that his protector had been unimpressed by his not crying when his knees did hurt so intensely. They reached the gate of his house. His mother stood anxiously on the front porch, since the accident had delayed him. He waved to her and she waved back.
27. The policeman said, "You might say to your mother that I suggest hot water first, and then an antiseptic and bandages." He cleared his throat. "You are a very brave young man. Many boys would have cried. I usually pass your school during the noon recess, and when we meet again, I hope we may walk together."
28. "Oh, I hope so too." He recalled his manners. "Thank you, sir," he said.
29. "And you are polite too. I'm sure we shall be friends."
30. He tipped his cap to the lady coming down the path and strolled impressively away.
31. Robert cried out, "Mother, I fell down and I couldn't breathe, and see my knees, all bleeding, and a policeman picked me up and came home with me."
32. "How nice of him. Oh, darling, this is dreadful. You can't go back to school this afternoon."
33. "Of course I can go back. I'm a very brave young man."
34. His mother laughed and hugged him to her, and treated his injuries as the policeman had suggested, although he forgot to tell her.

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35. He was a little late for the afternoon session, but he went boldly into the classroom with his bandaged knees. They were their own apology, and the teacher nodded to him and went on with the lesson. He was disappointed that she did not ask him any questions, so that he could tell of his peril and of his friend.
36. In the evening he could hardly wait for his father to come home. He hung on the gate, watching for him. When he saw him coming down the street, he ran to him and clasped him around the legs.
37. "Father, I fell down and hurt myself, and a policeman brought me home."
38. His father lifted quizzical eyebrows. "A policeman brought you home? Well, well. In chains, no doubt. What bad thing had you done?"
39. "Oh, father." He was accustomed to his father's jokes, and nothing could spoil his pleasure. "The policeman is my friend."
40. "Well, that may come in handy someday when you've done something really bad."
41. "Father." The jesting was adult, too, and he ate his vegetables at dinner without his mother's urging.
42. He was unable to avoid boasting at school, just a little, for Sergeant Masters was waiting for him almost every noon.
43. The tough boys sneered, "Who wants a cop for a friend? Yah. Bet your mamma pays him to take baby home. Yah. 'Fraid we'll beat you up. We don't beat up babies. Bet she pays him a dollar a week."
44. The idea had its unspeakable possibilities. His mother was often unduly solicitous. He did not dare approach her on the subject, but he did sound out the sergeant.
45. "Do you know my mother?" he asked one day.
46. "I don't have that pleasure. But as I said before, I am acquainted with your father."
47. Perhaps his father had hired the policeman. Perhaps his father had enemies and was threatened with the kidnapping of his son. This thought was exciting and acceptable, but it invalidated the friendship. He pondered over his next question. He felt very sly and clever as he asked it.
48. "A good policeman wouldn't take money for walking home with anybody, would he?"
49. The sergeant stopped and stared down at him. "Somebody has been putting ideas in your head. No, Robert, a good policeman doesn't take money for anything." He laid a huge gentle hand on the little boy's shoulder. "I am your friend. Always remember that friendship is a noble thing."
50. He was comforted. And then the snow apples on the tree in the yard began to ripen and fall. They lay each morning like rosy flowers in the soft grass. By family custom these were his own, the windfalls. He invited the policeman into the yard every day and insisted on his putting an apple in all his pockets.

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51. Sergeant Masters said invariably, "Thank you, Robert. I wish I had a little boy to take them home to. But I'll think of you and enjoy them."
52. One day the windfalls were scarce and the policeman would not take any, but said that he would prefer to think of Robert's eating them. The next noon there was only one snow apple on the ground. This was unreasonable, as the tree was still loaded. Robert watched from behind the hedge that evening, and saw Jimmy Thomas and his sister dash into the yard and swoop to the grass and dash away again. He was in a rage. It was his apple tree, his apples. He not only liked to use them as tribute to his friend but he was passionately fond of snow apples himself.
53. He ran toward the house to tell his father, then halted, and in triumph decided on a superior plan. Of what avail to have a policeman for a friend, if not to use him for his vengeance?
54. The next noon he prayed there would be no apples on the ground. There was a disappointingly large number, but still, he was sure, not nearly so many as usual. He turned haughtily to Sergeant Masters.
55. "Well," he said, "those Thomases have been over here again, stealing. I want you to arrest them and put them in jail. Right now."
56. "Arrest the Thomases for stealing? Who are the Thomases?"
57. "A horrid boy across the street and his nasty little sister. They've been stealing my snow apples."
58. "I see. Robert, do they have an apple tree?"
59. "No. But they don't have any right to mine."
60. "Have you ever given them any of your apples?"
61. "I don't have to. I don't like them. And you're my friend, you said so, and I want you to arrest them."
62. Sergeant Masters slowly took out from his pockets the apples that Robert had pressed on him and dropped them to the autumn earth.
63. "It's a very large tree, Robert," he said, "but perhaps you'd better just keep all the apples for yourself."
64. Robert stared at the gift apples discarded on the ground, then up at the beloved face far above him. It was sad and stern. He drew a gasping breath more painful than the one when he had fallen flat and the policeman had pounded him on the back and had become his friend. In a moment now Sergeant Masters would walk out of the gate and be lost to him forever. He threw his arms around the strong legs and gripped them tight and hid his face against them.

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65. A sparrow flew into the tree and chirped cheerfully in the dreadful silence. An apple dropped with a thump. A cloud drifted across the sun and the autumn air was chill. He shivered. The big hand of the policeman dropped slowly to his head and ruffled his hair. A great arm encircled him.
66. "It's all right, Robert."
67. The little boy burst into loud sobs of relief and shame. Friendship was a noble thing and he had proved unworthy.

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“Magic” Pablo

by Mark Brazaitis

1. Pablo and I liked to play “Let’s imagine.” We’d be walking down the street, a basketball cradled under one of our arms. Clouds would be gathering in the east, as they tended to do in early evening. A light rain—*chipi-chipi* is what everyone in town called it—might even be falling.
2. “Let’s imagine,” Pablo would say, “that Michael Jordan is walking with us.” He would smile. “What would these people say?” he would ask, pointing to the woman in the dark blue *cortes* and white *huipiles*, the native dress in this town in the Northern mountains of Guatemala. “What would they do?”
3. “They’d be amazed,” I’d say. “They wouldn’t know what to do.” Pablo agrees.
4. “They’d probably run. But we’d just keep walking down the street, the three of us, to the basketball court.”
5. Then Pablo would ask, “And how would we divide the teams?”
6. “Michael Jordan versus the two of us.”
7. Pablo would consider this. “No,” he’d say, “it’d be you and Michael Jordan versus me.”
8. Pablo was sixteen when I met him, another indistinguishable face in my English class of forty-five students.
9. I was twenty-five when I arrived as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Santa Cruz Verapez, a town of 4,000 people. I was prepared to be alone during my entire two-year service. I figured this was the way my life was supposed to be: silent sacrifice. I wasn’t, at any rate, expecting to make a friend my first night in town.
10. But the night after my first English class, Pablo knocked on my door. I invited him in, and he entered, looking around shyly. On a table in my dining room, he saw a copy of *Sports Illustrated* that my stepfather had sent from home. He pointed to the cover photo.
11. “Robert Parish,” he said. “The Chief.”
12. Pablo, it turned out, knew as much about basketball and the NBA as I did, and I was a former sportswriter.
13. I don’t know where he got his information. *El Grafico*, the only daily newspaper from the capital sold in our town, rarely had stories about American basketball. A Mexican TV station that reached Santa Cruz showed NBA games on Saturday mornings, but the town’s electricity was so unpredictable—occasionally it would be off for three or four days in a row—that I wondered how many of these games he could have seen. Pablo just seemed to know, and he was familiar not just with Robert Parish and other All-Stars; he could talk about obscure players like Chris Dudley and Jerome Kersey as if he were an NBA beat reporter.

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14. Pablo would come to my house at night and we would draft imaginary line-ups. Pablo liked non-American players. Hakeem Olajuwon was his favorite. He liked Mark Aguirre because he'd heard that Aguirre's father was born in Mexico. Dikembe Mutombo. Manute Bol. Drazen Petrovic. Selecting our imaginary teams, he'd always draft these players first.
15. I didn't get it. Why would he pick Vlade Divac instead of Charles Barkley? But the longer I lived in Guatemala, the better I understood.
16. The American presence in Guatemala is about as subtle as a Shaquille O'Neal slam dunk. The Pepsi logo covers entire storefronts. In Santa Cruz, the town basketball court is painted with a Coca-Cola motif, right down to the backboards. In some remote villages, children wear "Ninja Turtles" tee-shirts.
17. We had long arguments about who was the best player in the NBA. Hakeem Olajuwon versus Michael Jordan. Hakeem versus Patrick Ewing. Hakeem versus Magic Johnson.
18. Pablo stuck by his man.
19. Pablo and I played basketball on the court next to the cow pasture. Pablo was taller than Muggsy Bogues but shorter than Spud Webb, both of whom played in the NBA. When we first began playing, I could move him around with my body, backing him close to the basket. If I missed, I was tall enough to get a rebound. In games to twenty-one, I would beat him by nine, eleven, thirteen points.
20. Pablo was the first to tell me about Magic Johnson. He came over to my house one night, late.
21. "What is it?" I asked.
22. His head was bowed.
23. "What is it?"
24. He looked up. He wasn't crying, but he looked like he might need to. He said, "Magic has the AIDS virus."
25. We mourned together. Feeling sentimental, Pablo admitted, "Magic might be better than Hakeem."
26. Pablo's dream was to dunk a basketball. We calculated how many feet he would need to jump—about four.
27. Pablo drew up a training plan. He would jump rope two hours a day to build his leg strength. Every other day, Pablo would ask his younger brother to crouch, and he would leap, back and forth, for half an hour.
28. Two weeks later, Pablo came to my house and asked me to set up a hurdle in my courtyard. I stacked two chairs on top of each other, then another two chairs a few feet away. I placed a broom across the top of the chairs and measured: the broom was four feet off the ground.

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29. "I'm going to jump it," Pablo said.
30. "You sure?" I asked.
31. "Yes, I'm sure."
32. We stood there, gazing at the broom.
33. "You sure?" I asked again.
34. "I'm sure."
35. More gazing.
36. Then he backed up, took a few quick steps, and jumped. His knees shot to his chest. He leapt over the broom like a frog.
37. "You did it!" I yelled.
38. "I can dunk now," he said, grinning.
39. The next morning, we went to the basketball court. Pablo dribbled from half court and leapt. The ball clanked off the rim. He tried it again. Same result.
40. "I don't understand," he said.
41. I didn't have the heart to admit I'd misled him: to dunk, he'd have to jump four feet without bending his knees.
42. As a player, though, Pablo was getting better. He couldn't dunk, but he'd learned to use his quickness to drive by me and score. He had grown stronger. I could not back into him as easily.
43. Also, he had developed a jump shot.
44. "Let's imagine," Pablo would say, "that David Robinson came to visit us."
45. "All right," I'd say.
46. "Where would he stay?"
47. "I don't know. At a hotel, probably."
48. "No," Pablo would say, "he'd stay at your house. You'd let him sleep in your bed."
49. "Yeah, that would be better."
50. "And you'd make him dinner."
51. "Sure."
52. "And at night," Pablo would say, "we'd sit around and talk about basketball."

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53. Pablo was not my best student. He was more interested in basketball than books. But he knew how to make his teacher laugh.
54. When he missed a quiz, I allowed him to make it up by writing five sentences — any five sentences of his choice — in English.
55. He wrote:
1. Charles Barkley sang a song in my house.
 2. I beat Patrick Ewing in slam dunk.
 3. I beat David Robinson in block.
 4. Hakeem Olajuwon is my brother.
 5. Magic and Pablo are the best friends of Mark.
56. Despite his interest in basketball, Pablo's best sport was soccer. He played for San Pedro Carcha, a nearby town. Pablo was a good play-maker. Quick dribbler. Good passer. Soccer's equivalent of a point-guard, not a power forward.
57. I'd seen several of Pablo's games and had watched him make gorgeous passes, beautiful sky-touching passes that his teammates batted into the net for goals.
58. My last week in Guatemala as a Peace Corps Volunteer, I attended a game Pablo's team played against San Cristobal, a town nine kilometers west of Santa Cruz. The game was tied 1–1 going into the final minutes. Pablo's team had a corner kick. The crowd, about a thousand strong, was silent.
59. The ball soared into the air. A mass of players, including Pablo, gathered to receive it. Pablo jumped, his body shooting up like a rocket off a launcher. His timing was perfect. His head met the ball and the ball flew past the goalie.
60. Pablo's teammates paraded him around the field on their shoulders. People from the crowd, per custom, handed him money.
61. When I talked to him later, I didn't need to point out why he'd been able to jump that high. He said it himself. "It's basketball. I learned it from basketball. From trying to dunk."
62. We played our last game the day before I left Guatemala. We played in the evening, as a light rain—a *chipichipi*—fell.
63. He had learned to play defense. I tried to back him toward the basket, but he held his ground. I was forced to use my unreliable jump shot. I could no longer get every rebound because he'd learned to block out. And, of course, he could jump now.
64. I got lucky and hit two straight jumpers to pull ahead by four. But he countered with a reverse lay-up. He scored again on a long jump shot, a shot he never would have made when we first played.
65. The rain fell harder now. Puddles were beginning to form on the court. Pablo and I were both panting. It was getting dark; we could barely see the basket.
66. "Let's quit," I said. "Let's leave it like this."
67. "If you want," he said.

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68. "Yeah, let's leave it like this. A tie."
69. "All right," he said. "A tie. Good. Let's leave it."
70. We hugged each other.
71. "Let's imagine," Pablo said, as we walked to my house for the last time, "that you and I played against Michael Jordan. Who would win?"
72. "Jordan," I said.
73. "No," Pablo said. "We would. Believe me, we would."

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Sunny Days and Sunny Nights

by M. E. Kerr

1. "Females prefer chunky peanut butter over smooth, forty-three percent to thirty-nine percent," Alan announces at dinner, "while men show an equal liking for both."
2. My father likes this conversation. I think even my mother does, since she is telling Alan enthusiastically that she likes smooth. Moments before she confided that she preferred red wine, after Alan said that women are more likely than men to order wine in a restaurant, and a majority prefer white.
3. Alan is filled with this sort of information.
4. He wants to become an advertising man. He is enrolled in journalism school for that purpose. He's my height, when I'm wearing heels, has brown hair and brown eyes, lives not far away in Salisbury, North Carolina. We go out mostly to hit movies, and he explains their appeal afterward, over coffee at a campus hangout. He prides himself on knowing what sells, and why, and what motivates people. Sometimes when we kiss, I imagine he knows exactly what percentage of females close their eyes, and if more males keep theirs open.
5. I long for Sunny.
6. Whenever Sunny came to dinner, my father winced at his surfers' talk and asked him pointedly if he had a "real" name. Harold, Sunny would tell him, and my father would say, that's not such a bad name, you can make Harry out of that, and once he came right out and told Sunny that a man shouldn't have a boy's name.
7. When Sunny finally joined the Navy my father said, well, they'll make a man out of him.
8. He's a man, I said, believe me. Look at him and tell me he's not a man. Because Sunny towers over my father, has a Rambo build, and a walk, smile, and way about him that oozes confidence. Hair the color of the sun, deep blue eyes. Always tanned, always. Even my mother murmured, oh, he's a man, Sunny is.
9. But my father shook his head and said, I don't mean *that*. I mean the boy has a boy's ambition, you only have to listen to all that talk about the big waves, the surf, the beach—either he's a boy or a fish, but he's not someone with his eye on the future. He's not someone thinking about a profession!
10. One of the hard things about going to college in your hometown is that your family meets your dates right away. If I had the good luck to live in a dorm, my father couldn't cross-examine all of them while I finish dressing and get myself downstairs. Even when I'm ready ahead of time, he manages to squeeze out as much information about them as he can, once he's shaken hands with one, and while we're standing there looking for our exit line.

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11. He likes Alan right away.
12. After dinner is over, while Alan and I go for a walk, Alan says, "I really like your family. Did they like me, do you think?"
13. "I know they did."
14. But my mother never once threw her head back and laughed, the way she used to when Sunny was at the table, never said, oh *you!* to Alan, like someone trying hard not to love his teasing—no one ever teased her but Sunny.
15. He'd tell her she looked like Princess Di (maybe . . . a little) and he'd often exclaim, you've made my day, darlin'! when he'd taste her special fried chicken. My father calls her Kate or Mama, and he can't eat anything fried because of the cholesterol, but they've been rocking together on our front porch through twenty years of marriage, and he does have a profession: He's a judge.
16. Oh, is he a judge!
17. Sunny, he said once when Sunny alluded to a future with me, every Friday noon Marybeth's mother comes down to my office and we go out to lunch. It's a ritual with us: I get to show her off to my colleagues, and we stroll over to the hotel, enjoy an old-fashioned, have the special-of-the-day, and set aside that time for us. . . . I hope someday my daughter will be going down to her own husband's place of business to do the exact same thing.
18. Later Sunny said, He wasn't kidding, was he?
19. Him? I said. Kid? I said.
20. It was a week to the day that Sunny asked me to marry him. We were just graduated from high school. I was already planning my courses at the university when Sunny got wind of a job in Santa Monica, running a shop called Sun & Surf. Sunny'd moved from California when his folks broke up. His mom brought him back to Greenville, where she waited table in his grandfather's diner. . . . I never knew what Sunny's father did for a living, but my father, who spent a lot of time trying to worm it out of Sunny, said it sounded as though he was a "common laborer." Can't he be just a laborer? I said. Does he have to be a common one?
21. Marybeth, said my father, I'm just looking out for you. I like the boy. He's a nice boy. But we're talking here about the whole picture. . . . Does Sunny ever mention college?
22. I want to go to college, I told Sunny.
23. You can go out on the coast somewhere.
24. How? Daddy won't pay for it if we get married.
25. We'll figure out something.
26. It's too vague, Sunny, and too soon.

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27. What's vague about it?
28. Don't *you* want to go to college, Sunny? Don't you want a profession?
29. Sunny said he couldn't believe I felt the way my father did, in the letter he left with my mother for me. He said the Navy was his best bet, and at least he'd be on water. He didn't say anything about waiting for him, or writing—nothing about the future. I'd said some other things that last night together, after he'd made fun of my father's talk about my parents' Friday-noon ritual. They don't even touch, he'd said: I've never once seen them touch, or heard them use affectionate names, or laugh together. So she shows up at his office once a week—big deal! . . . Honey, we've got a love that'd like to bust through the roof! You don't want to just settle for something like they did! They settled!
30. They love each other, I argued back, it just doesn't show. . . . Sunny said that was like plastic over wood, and love should splinter, crack, and burn!
31. You know how it is when someone criticizes your family, even when you might have thought and said the same things. You strike out when you hear it from another mouth, say things you don't mean, or you do, and wouldn't have said under any other circumstances.
32. I said, at least my father could always take care of my mother! At least he'd made something of himself, and she could be proud of him! That's good enough for me, I said. I knew from the hurt look in Sunny's eyes he was hearing that he wasn't.
33. "Seventy-four percent of American adults are interested in professional football," Alan says as we walk along under the stars. "Eighty-seven percent of men and sixty-three percent of women."
34. I can hear Sunny's voice saying blah blah blah blah blah blah!
35. "Alan," I say, "what kind of office does an advertising man have?"
36. "Mine's going to be in New York City, and there'll be a thick rug on the floor, and a view of the whole Manhattan skyline from the windows. Do you like New York, Marybeth?"
37. "Anyplace but here!" I answer. "I'd like to get out of the South! I'd like to live near an ocean." I was picturing Sunny coming in on a big wave out in California. "I'd like to always be tanned."
38. Alan shakes his head. "That's out of style now. The ozone layer and all. White skin is in. No one wants a tan anymore."
39. When we get to the curb, Alan puts his hand under my arm and remarks, "You smell good. What perfume is that?"
40. "I don't remember what I put on." I was thinking of nights with Sunny we'd walk down this street with our arms wrapped around each other, and Sunny'd say, let's name our kids. Say we have four, two girls and two boys. You get to name a boy and a girl.

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41. Alan lets go of my arm when we get across the street.
42. "I like the fact you're majoring in economics," he says. "You could go into investment banking. New York is where you want to go too."
43. "Sure, New York," I say. "That's for me."
44. Next weekend I have a date with John. Premed. Chunky. Beautiful smile. On the porch he tells my father, "I'll take good care of her. Don't worry."
45. "What are you going to specialize in?" My father gets one last question in as we are heading down the steps.
46. "Pediatrics, sir," and John grins and grabs my hand as we walk to his white Pontiac.
47. My mother is sitting in the wicker rocker on the porch, waving at us as we take off.
48. "Nice people," John says.
49. We drive to the SAE house with the top down, the moon just rising. "Your family reminds me of mine," he says. "Your mom so warm and welcoming, and your dad all concerned about me. . . . My father's that way about my kid sister when boys come to take her out. I don't have a lot of time to date, so I like dating someone whose family I can meet. You can tell a lot about a girl by her folks."
50. "They never touch," I tell him. "I mean, not openly."
51. "Like mine. You watch mine and you wonder how two kids got born."
52. We look at each other and laugh.
53. I like him. His wit, his good manners, his dancing, even his "shop talk" about his premed courses. He is a good listener, too, questioning me about what I'm studying, my ideas; he is the perfect date.
54. "Did you have a good time, sweetheart?" my mother asks.
55. "So-so." I tell the truth.
56. "In that case I hate to tell you what's on the hall table."
57. It's an overnight letter from Western Union. Short and sweet.
58. ARRIVING TOMORROW NIGHT. HAVE PROFESSION AND HIGH HOPES. LOVE, HAROLD.
59. "He's coming back, isn't he?" Mom says.
60. I show it to her.

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61. "You like him, Mom, so why did you hate to tell me about this?"
62. "I like him a lot, but I don't think your father's ever going to resign himself to Sunny, even if he does call himself Harold."
63. "He has a profession, he says!" I am dancing around the room, hugging the letter. "He has high hopes!"
64. "I think he's the same old Sunny, honey, and I think it's just going to be more heartbreak. Oh, I do like him. Truly I do. But you started seeing Alan and John. You took a step away from Sunny."
65. "Just give him a chance, Mom."
66. "Give who a chance?" my father's voice.
67. He is coming into the living room in his robe and pajamas.
68. "Harold!" I exclaim. "Just give Harold a chance!"
69. "We used to chant 'Give peace a chance,' when I was in college," my father says, "and I'd say Sunny having a chance is like peace having a chance. Peace being what it is, and Sunny being what he is, no chance will do much to change things. Won't last. . . . Now, John is a young man I really warm to. Did you have a good time with John?"
70. "He was the perfect date," I answer.
71. "You said it was a so-so time," says my mother.
72. "Maybe I'm not into perfection."
73. When I meet the little plane that flies from Charlotte to Greenville, I can see Sunny getting off first, lugging his duffel bag, dressed in his Navy uniform, hurrying through the rain, tan as anything, tall, and grinning even before he can spot me in the small crowd.
74. He has a box of candy—"Not for you, my love," he says, "it's for your mama." Then he kisses me, hugs me, hangs on hard and whispers, "Let's name our kids. Say we've got six, all boys, first one's Harold junior. We could call him Harry."
75. There is no way I can get him to talk about his profession on the way home in my father's Buick. He says he is going to tell me at the same time he tells my folks, that all we are going to talk about on the way there is how soon I can transfer to the university near the base. He has three more years in the Navy and an application for reduced tuition for Navy wives, providing I still love him the way he loves me, do I? . . . Yes? Okay!
76. He says, "Park the car somewhere fast before we go straight home, because we've got to get the fire burning lower, or we'll scorch your loved ones." Here's a place.
77. My father growls, "One *hour* getting back here from the airport, was the traffic *that* bad on a weeknight? We thought you'd had an accident. . . ." And my mother purrs, "Guess what's cooking?"

Reading Passages: 10th Grade

78. "Fried chicken!" Harold cries, sounding like the same old Sunny. "Darlin', you have made my day! Love you and want some huggin' from my one and only!"
79. "Oh, *you!*" my mother says.
80. It does not take my father long to start in; he starts in at the same time he picks up his fork.
81. "What's this about a profession, Sunny? Harold?"
82. "Yes, sir, I am a professional man now."
83. "You're becoming a professional sailor, is that it?"
84. "No, sir. I'm leaving the Navy eventually, but thanks to the Navy, I now have a profession that suits me."
85. "Which is?"
86. "I'm an underwater welder."
87. "Let's eat before we get into all this," says my mother, fast.
88. "You're a *what?*"
89. "An underwater welder."
90. My father begins to sputter about Alan, who is going into advertising, and John, the aspiring baby doctor, those are professions, but what kind of . . . what kind of . . .
91. And my mother is passing the gravy, passing the cranberry relish, the biscuits, keeping her hands flying between the table and Sunny.
92. "Where will you, where will . . ." my father again, and if he ever finishes the sentence, I don't know. For I am seeing Sunny see me. I am seeing him be true to me and to himself. Perhaps my father wants to ask where will you do this, where will your office be, for my father is one to think in terms of a man's workplace.
93. But I am drifting in my thoughts to future Fridays, traditional and loving, donning a wet suit for a rendezvous in the deep blue sea. Keeping my date with that warm fish I married.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade

from

Newcomers in a Troubled Land

by Naomi Shihab Nye

1. Our four-year-old is printing his name on a piece of yellow construction paper. I bend to see which name it is today. For awhile he wanted to be *called* Paper. Today he's gone back to the real one. Each blocky letter a house, a mountain, a caboose . . . then he prints my name underneath his. He draws squiggly lines from the letters in my name to the same letters in his own. "Naomi, look, we're inside one another, did you know that? Your name is here, inside mine!"
2. Every letter of *Naomi* is contained in his name *Madison*—we pause together, mouths open. I did not know that. Although we have been mouthing one another's names for years, and already as mother and son we contain one another in so many ways it would be hard to name them all.
3. For a long time he sits staring, smiling at the paper, turning it around on the table. "Do I have any friends," he asks, "who have *their* mother's names inside their names?" We try a few—none does. And the soft afternoon light falling into the kitchen where we sit says, *this is a gift*.
4. When I was small, the name *Naomi*, which means *pleasant*, seemed hard to live up to. And *Shihab*, *shooting star* or *meteor* in Arabic, harder yet. I never met another of either in those days. My mother, Miriam, whose name meant *bitter*, said I didn't know how lucky I was.
5. Hiking the tree-lined streets of our St. Louis borough en route to school, I felt common names spring up inside my mouth, waving their leafy syllables. I'd tongue them for blocks, trying them on. Susie. Karen. Debbie. Who would I be if I'd had a different name? I turned right on a street called Louise. Did all Karens have some region of being in which they were related? I called my brother *Alan* for a week without letting my parents hear. He was really Adlai, for Adlai Stevenson, a name that also means *justice* in Arabic, if pronounced with enough flourish.
6. Neither of us had middle names.
7. I admired our parents for that. They hadn't tried to pad us or glue us together with any little wad of name stuck in the middle.
8. Not until I was sixteen, slouching sleepily in the back seat of my best friend's sister's car, did I fall in love with my own name. It had something to do with neon on a shopping center sign, that steady color holding firm as the nervous December traffic swarmed past. Holding my eyes to the radiant green bars of light as the engine idled at a corner, I felt the soft glow of my own name stretch warmly awake inside me. It balanced on my tongue. It seemed pleasurable, at long last, to feel recognizable to oneself. Was this a secret everyone knew?

Reading Passages: 10th Grade

9. Names of old countries and towns had always seemed exquisitely arbitrary, odd. The tags in the backs of garments, the plump bodies of words. We had moved from the city of one saint to the city of another, San Antonio, whose oldest inner-city streets had names like *Eager* and *Riddle*. We had left the river of many syllables, with a name long enough to be used as a timing device, Mississippi, for a river so small you could call it Creek or Stream and not be too far off. We ate *kousa*, *tabooleh*, *baba ghannouj*—Arabic food—on a street called Arroya Vista.
10. My husband first appeared to me in a now-vanished downtown San Antonio eatery with a pleasantly understated name, Quinney’s Just Good Food. Businessmen in white shirts and ties swarmed around us, woven together by steaming plates of fried fish and mashed potatoes. I knew, from the first moment of our chance encounter, that he was “the one”—it felt like a concussion to know this.
11. Walking up South Presa Street later with my friend Sue, who’d introduced us, I asked dizzily, “What was his last name?” She said, “Nye, like eye,” and the rhymes began popping into my head. They matched our steps. Like *hi*, like *why*, like *bye*—suddenly like every word that seemed to matter. She waved at her corner and I stood there a long time, staring as the crossing signal changed back and forth from a red raised hand to a little man walking. And I knew that every street I crossed from that moment on would be a different street.
12. Because I am merely a tenant of this name Nye—it is not the house I always occupied—it inspires a traveler’s warm affection in me. I appreciate its brevity. Reading about the thirteenth-century Swedes who fled internal uprisings in their own country to resettle in Denmark in settlements prefixed by *Nye*—meaning new, or newcomer—deserves a border-crosser’s nod.
13. Hundreds of families listed in the *Nye Family of America Association* volumes gather regularly at Sandwich, Massachusetts, to shake hands and share each other’s lives. I would like to join them, which surprises me. They started their tradition of gathering in 1903. R. Glen Nye writes, “How can we reach you to tell you how important it is for you to know your origins. . . . Those who read this are the oldsters of tomorrow . . . a hundred years hence, we will be the very ones someone will yearn to know about. Who will they turn to then, if we do not help them now?”
14. Because my own father came to New York on the boat from his old country of Palestine in 1950, I am curious about these Nyes who came on the boat just following the *Mayflower*, who stayed and stayed and stayed, who built the Nye Homestead on Cape Cod, now a museum pictured on postcards and stationery notes. They have kept such good track of one another. Thick volumes list them, family by family, birthdates, children, occupations.
15. On a driving trip east, my husband and I paused one blustery day to walk around the cemetery at Sandwich. It felt eerie to sidestep so many imposing granite markers engraved with our own name. Oh Benjamin, oh Katherine and Reuben, you who had no burglar alarms, what did you see that we will never see? And the rest of you Nyes, wandering out across America even as far as Alaska where cars and trucks and jeeps all have their license plates set into little metal frames proclaiming NYE in honor of some enterprising car dealer who claimed the Land of the Midnight Sun as his territory, where did you get your energy? What told you to go?

Reading Passages: 10th Grade

16. Once my husband and I invited every Nye in the San Antonio telephone book to dinner. Such reckless festivity would have been more difficult had our name been Sánchez or Smith; as it stood, the eleven entries for Nye seemed too provocative to pass up. Eleven groups of people sharing a name within one city—and we didn't know any of them.
17. Handwritten invitation—"If you're named Nye, you're invited." Would they *get it*? I was brazen enough to style it a "potluck"—a gathering where the parties themselves would be a potluck—and asked all to RSVP. A week later each family had responded positively, with glinting curiosity, except one humorless fireman, whom I telephoned at the last minute. He was too busy for such frivolous pursuit.
18. Later I would remember how the picnic table in our backyard spilled a rich offering of pies and green beans and potato salads, how the talk seemed infinite in its variety, how the laughter—"What a wacky idea, Babe!"—some Nye slapping me on the back with sudden gusto—rolled and rolled.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade

Visual Representation from page 14



- JUST TELL MY DAD THAT YOU'RE
A BRAIN SURGEON!

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

The Quality of Mercy

by H. Barrett Pennell, Jr.

1. The sky began to brighten in the north on that early-March day, as the roiled, greasy-gray clouds of the all-night storm began their retreat to the south and west.
2. We sloshed our way along the bank of the creek, “our creek” to us, a pair of ten-year-old males. We had decided on a tour of inspection of our holdings to see what damage the storm had wrought. And the creek was still there, still wandering its earnest, four-foot-wide way through the meadow, which was spongy underfoot with the gray-green, dead-alive promise of what would soon be grass. The rocks had not been harmed, we noted with satisfaction, and the pool beside the willow was still a pool, despite what must have been a temptation to go and join the sea. But the grass along the edges, and along the upper bank—the tough, fibrous evergreen grass that seemed to defy everything in its turn—was lying flat in its place, all tips pointed regimentally after the departing waters. So we were somewhat angry with the water, as a bully who destroys a myth.
3. But the overall loss was slight. Our creek was still alive and our plaything, and there were no other little boys to take it, and claim it, and mother it, and dam it with clods of tough, worm-filled sod and its own rocks. And there was none to pelt its muskrats and scare its minnows and trap its crawdads and capture its tadpoles. So we inspected—hermetically sealed in parkas and overshoes—sloshing through the drowned grass and rat-furred moss with the utter confidence of proprietorship.
4. We worked our way slowly, examining every inch, the way one does for hurt to valued property, while the excited air buffeted us with the first live messages of coming spring.
5. George found two marbles just below the gravelly spot beyond the willow pool, one chipped a little and the other polished by the sand and water to a better-than-new luster. I found a small earthenware jar with a clear, glazed finish and a kiln burn on the bottom side. I told George the jar was a remnant of the days when Indians used to camp along the banks of the creek. (I almost believed this to be true, and I wanted to.) George wondered who had lost the marbles. And great was our excitement and wonder that the creek was still as it had been, yet giving us new treasures, saved for years for some such special day as this.
6. And in the spot where the stream curved, and ate its way into the bank, where the red slash of clay towered upward for six feet above the trotting water and looked like red Swiss cheese—there were the muskrats, hiding in their daytime holes. With joyous whoops we attacked their sanctuary, hurling small rocks and stones toward the holes, around which the missiles of our last attack stuck in the mud like stone pickets. The savage satisfaction of the attack and the power, welling in our blood like a rare narcotic, to do destruction to these small creatures always sank a little in our hearts when a stone would dart into the depths of one of the holes. Then there was no satisfying smack of rock on mud, but only an echo, which could have been the sound of murder, and bright-gem eyes in the dark narrowing in pain and going out without the sight of another dawn. So, saddened by the ultimate outcome, we broke off the attack until the next time, not knowing if we were murderers or not, but hoping not, with all the desire serious doubt can bring.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

7. Then we were explorers along our new-old creek—La Salle, De Soto, Lewis and Clark, voyageurs with muskrat hides stalking the banks of the Mississippi and other, lesser streams, seeking cautious trade with Indians.
8. Until George discovered the fish, swimming weakly in the stream.
9. We squatted on our heels in the creek-bed gravel, watching the fish struggle in our mighty, six-inch-deep Mississippi as it tried to make its way upstream. It floundered on the shoals of flattened boulders, its back appearing above the water in its struggle. It was a carp, about ten inches long, and far too large for our stream. Evidently it had been washed down in the torrential night from a safe pool somewhere far away, perhaps beyond where the stream goes under the railroad tracks and disappears into the earth. Now it was trying to get home, upstream, from where it had come so easily the night before.
10. The tail that beat feebly upon the shallow water was split and ragged; scales were missing from its battered side, and somewhere in the middle of the fish there was a wound, where pinkish flesh hung tattered out beyond the skin. It rested now, in sheer exhaustion, every slight movement crying out that it was one more movement too many beyond the range of life's endurance.
11. We watched without a word as the tired fish learned of our presence and tried instinctively to dart away, but only wrenched its way into the shallows, where it fell on its side and was carried back by the stream into the pool by which we knelt.
12. Great was our concern for the trapped fish fighting hard for present life, mindless of a further soul, with the instinctive courage that man admires in himself, but tends to call bestial in the beast, and we searched about for means of rescue.
13. George found the bottom of a milk bottle, but that was too small; I discovered a small coffee can near the willow pool, but the bottom had rusted out. So we used my waterproof parka hood instead, bulging it full of muddy water, carefully scooping out the failing fish, and dropping it into the sodden hood. We began our march of mercy down the length of the creek and across the road, headed for the big pool in the bird sanctuary, where the water was 5 feet deep and 20 across. And as we walked, fast but gingerly, holding the water-filled hood like a suspended binnacle and staggering somewhat with the weight, some of the water slopped out and dampened our clothes; it began to leak slowly through the waterproof hood, leaving a damp trail along the paving as we hurried along the road toward the deep hole. And every spilled drop was blood, and every step nearer, life.
14. At last we came to the sanctuary and slipped past the chain-link fence where the fence had to stop for the bridge of the creek, and we slid down the worn trail to the bank of the pool. The fish was almost dead, and its back was above water again in the hood.
15. I lowered the hood into the shallow water at the edge of the pool, and as the edge of the hood fell away, the fish drifted out into the water, its fins moving feebly, but fast, lying on its side on the surface. We stood mutely in the mud and watched the fish fight for life again.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

16. Its tail moved convulsively, and it moved forward several inches, turning almost upright with the motion. Several more times it did this, nearly turning upright every time until, at length, it was successful. Then, with its mouth taking great gulps of air from the surface and its gills moving in convulsions, the fish slowly swam around the pool, merely moving, for there was still no strength or purpose in it. And still we didn't speak, as the fish seemed to grow new strength before our eyes. It gulped and it thrashed its gills for five full minutes, as if cleansing out the putrefaction of near-death with the new oxygen-full water.
17. George flipped a small stone into the water, a few feet from where the fish rested. With a small swirl, the fish disappeared, and the eddies made by the stone and the fish rocked one another into submission in the small wooded pool.
18. As we stared after our success, glowing inwardly in our Samaritanism, George knew why I had snapped at him when he had asked, back when we first put the fish in the hood, if I were going to feed the fish to my cat.
19. At home, the soggy parka hood was hung up to dry by my mother, who thanked me with her voice for the gift of the earthenware jar and wondered in her mind just what it was that made boys do senseless things like throwing the tops of their parkas into the stream.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

A “Real School” Is Born

by Collin Perry

1. LORRAINE MONROE sat dumbfounded, watching the spectacle before her. She had pulled into the faculty parking lot of Harlem’s Frederick Douglass Intermediate School just as the next-to-last-period bell sounded. Dozens of students streamed from exits, running and screaming wildly.
2. “This is nothing,” an administrator told her. “I’ve seen textbooks sail out windows. Even classroom chairs.”
3. It was May 1991, and Lorraine Monroe had arrived for a tour of the junior high school where she had just become principal. As kids exchanged whoops and high-fives, she was told that a few days earlier, some students had climbed a 14-foot-high chain-link fence and broken their falls by jumping onto the teachers’ cars below.
4. Monroe knew that Frederick Douglass—once considered among the top schools in New York City—had lost its academic luster. But nothing in her experience as a teacher or as deputy chancellor of New York City public schools had prepared her for this.
5. As she headed for the office of school administrator Howard Lew, Monroe picked her way through the filthy, graffitied hallways, stepping over students sitting on the floor and past others roaming in groups—even though classes were in session.



6. Touring with Lew, Monroe took in the broken windows, and graffiti-coated blackboards. Ceilings in many rooms looked as though they had been systematically punched out by students. Fires had left other classrooms gutted and boarded up.
7. In class after class, students lounged on windowsills, laughing and gossiping while the teacher tried valiantly to teach. The few kids who wanted to learn were either unable to because of the chaos or afraid to try.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

8. “Seen enough?” Lew asked.
9. Monroe just shook her head. *This isn’t a school*, she thought. *It’s a holding pen. What am I going to do?*
- Dream Maker.**
10. Monroe had grown up not far from Frederick Douglass. Back then the neighborhoods were not as devastated by drugs and gangs, but life had been hard. In many ways, it was Lorraine’s tough-minded mother who had maintained the family. She had sweated the details, organizing, cleaning, shopping and hustling about on Sundays getting everyone together for church. She made it into a ritual, a real tradition.
11. That’s what’s missing from the lives of kids here—order and tradition, Monroe thought. Children need a place they can go to escape the chaos.
12. But ritual and tradition alone weren’t the answer. Lorraine’s father, a metalworker, was an example of someone always doing the unexpected, always doing the bold thing.
13. As a child, Lorraine used to pore over newspaper ads for houses in the country. “Look at this one, Dad,” she’d call out. “It’s got a fireplace! Sure wish we had one. Can you imagine?”
14. “Yes, baby, that sure would be something.”
15. “Look, here’s another one: ‘Split-level ranch priced to sell’—and, see, a fireplace!”
16. Then one Saturday he showed up with wood to build a fireplace in the living room of their walk-up apartment. No flue? Not a problem. In no time the family was enjoying the best electric-flame fireplace in all of West Harlem. Sometimes, you just had to start from nothing—and be bold.
17. Then it hit her: did she dare envision starting from scratch with Frederick Douglass?
- Real School.**
18. A few weeks later, she made her announcement: “The school is being closed, Mr. Lew, and we’re starting all over.”
19. Monroe explained that she had already talked to the school board about a new approach. With Frederick Douglass such an embarrassment, they were willing to try anything.
20. “We’ll reopen in September and start with the seventh grade; the following year, seventh and eighth, and so on until we have a completely new combined junior and senior high school. We’ll no longer be just another school: we’ll be Frederick Douglass Academy for college and professional careers.”
21. “Where will everyone go,” Lew asked, “while we’re getting this under way?”
22. “They’ll be absorbed into other community schools.”
23. She noticed his look of concern. “Howard, we have a unique opportunity here—not just for tinkering, but for creating a model for all inner-city schools. I’m talking about real academics, real achievement, real discipline. You know, *real school*.”

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

24. Lew slapped his hand on his desk. "Real school! I love it!"
25. Monroe composed a list of "Twelve Non-negotiables"—rules that all students must follow or face real consequences, ranging from in-school suspension to expulsion. The rules included: No gum, candy, hats or radios. No physical or verbal violence. No defacing of school property. Uniforms worn daily. Students must show respect for staff and one another at all times.
26. The staff devised a college-preparatory curriculum. "Math, science, social science, English and a foreign language will be the basics," Monroe declared.
27. A few teachers left the school by mutual agreement, feeling the highly disciplined environment was not for them. That allowed Monroe to handpick new teachers—people with enthusiasm and a sense of purpose.
- High Expectations.**
28. Next, she had to sell the academy to the community. As expected, objections to uniforms—"freedom of expression will be denied"—came from community leaders. But not from parents. Monroe pointed out that uniforms were already prevalent: those of violent gangs and designer-clothing retailers.
29. "And if they can afford \$100 sneakers," Monroe said, "they can afford a traditional outfit or two."
30. When asked what she expected of parents, she replied, "That you support the concept of high expectations."
31. On opening day in September 1991, 150 wide-eyed seventh-graders in navy-and-white uniforms trooped into a new school. The interior shimmered in bright yellow and blue. Clean white tiles hung from the ceilings. Classrooms were completely refitted and open for business.
32. There was one exception to the "starting over" premise: Robinson Cuevas, a boy from the Dominican Republic who had failed miserably in the old school yet slipped through the review process. His papers wound up on Monroe's desk, flagged with a bright red question mark. *I may be making a mistake*, she thought, *but why not give the kid a chance?* She stamped the application "APPROVED."
- Rules Are Rules.**
33. From that first day Monroe was everywhere, getting to know the kids, encouraging the staff and unexpectedly popping in on teachers—a practice they don't traditionally welcome. "A principal who stays in her office might as well stay home" was Monroe's position.
34. What she ended up with was a fine academic school running smoothly. Real school. She had innovative, dedicated teachers, and kids who were doing so remarkably well that even she was surprised.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

35. After just one year, Frederick Douglass students scored at the top of their district in city sponsored tests for reading and math. Monroe's critics now paid her the ultimate "compliment," claiming that if her kids were performing above average, she must be "creaming" Harlem—taking only the best students. Monroe pointed out school policy: 75 percent of the students had to come from Central Harlem. "No cherry-picking here. Just the hard work of education."
36. There was no more poignant proof of this than Monroe's ongoing struggle to educate Robinson Cuevas. He was chronically in trouble for talking back to teachers and refusing to work.
37. One afternoon Monroe sat down to meet with him. "Robinson," she began, "we've tried our best, but things aren't working out. Maybe you'll settle down to work in another environment."
38. Like so many kids, Cuevas had been conditioned by bluff. Goof off, and you meet with threats and calls home, but never expulsion. Suddenly the young man was near tears.
39. "Robinson, you've had every chance to make it here."
40. "I know, Dr. Monroe, I know." Then he looked her square in the eye. "I guess I'm asking you to give me one more chance."
41. "Okay," she said, standing. "But just *one* complaint from *anybody* and that's it! Understood?"
42. "Yes, ma'am," the boy replied, trembling visibly.
43. "Now, stand up," Monroe said, "and let's shake on it."
- Feeling Proud.**
44. One day in 1994, Lorraine Monroe headed toward a ninth grade class. Long accustomed to his boss's "radical" ideas, Lew had feigned shock when Monroe suggested they offer Japanese at Frederick Douglass. "Look around you," she'd said. "It's Japanese cars and CD players we're buying. We have to look ahead."
45. Entering the classroom, she smiled at the young instructor, Chie Mochizuki-Helenski, and took a seat.
46. "*Basuketto boora no geemu-ni ikimashita,*" Mochizuki-Helenski intoned. "Translate, please."
47. Hands strained toward the ceiling. "I went to a basketball game!" one of the boys shouted. "I taught that one to my mother last night," he said, beaming.
48. Monroe resisted the urge to pinch herself. Yes, this was Central Harlem, one of the innermost of inner cities. Yes, this was a public school. But this child of the ghetto was not only learning a difficult foreign language; he was passing some of it on to a parent.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

49. By spring of 1996 Lorraine Monroe had many reasons to feel proud. She had brought order and boldness to her school, and it now housed more than 700 students. Nearly all were on course for college. Walking back to her office, she passed a boy who called out, "Hello, Dr. Monroe!"
50. "Hey there, Robinson. All's well?"
51. The stocky, well-turned-out boy gave her the thumbs-up sign and smiled brilliantly. Three years after being given one more chance, Cuevas was one of her "aces," a top student who had just been accepted at Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y.
52. Reaching her office, Monroe walked by a school banner that read "The tradition of excellence continues." Lorraine Monroe couldn't resist giving the thumbs-up sign before returning to her desk—and to the hard work of education.

Reading Passages: 10th Grade Makeup

Visual Representation from page 12

**America
will need
1,000,000
new nurses by
the year 2010.**



**It's time to start thinking
about a career in nursing.**

NURSING
PUT YOUR LIFE INTO OUR HANDS.



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Reading Passages: 11th Grade

The Snob

by Morley Callaghani

1. IT WAS at the book counter in the department store that John Harcourt, the student, caught a glimpse of his father. At first he could not be sure in the crowd that pushed along the aisle, but there was something about the color of the back of the elderly man's neck, something about the faded felt hat, that he knew very well. Harcourt was standing with the girl he loved, buying a book for her. All afternoon he had been talking to her, eagerly, but with an anxious diffidence, as if there still remained in him an innocent wonder that she should be delighted to be with him. From underneath her wide-brimmed straw hat, her face, so fair and beautifully strong with its expression of cool independence, kept turning up to him and sometimes smiled at what he said. That was the way they always talked, never daring to show much full, strong feeling. Harcourt had just bought the book, and had reached into his pocket for the money with a free, ready gesture to make it appear that he was accustomed to buying books for young ladies, when the white-haired man in the faded felt hat, at the other end of the counter, turned half-toward him, and Harcourt knew he was standing only a few feet away from his father.
2. The young man's easy words trailed away and his voice became little more than a whisper, as if he were afraid that everyone in the store might recognize it. There was rising in him a dreadful uneasiness; something very precious that he wanted to hold seemed close to destruction. His father, standing at the end of the bargain counter, was planted squarely on his two feet, turning a book over thoughtfully in his hands. Then he took out his glasses from an old, worn leather case and adjusted them on the end of his nose, looking down over them at the book. His coat was thrown open, two buttons on his vest were undone, his hair was too long, and in his rather shabby clothes he looked very much like a workingman, a carpenter perhaps. Such a resentment rose in young Harcourt that he wanted to cry out bitterly, "Why does he dress as if he never owned a decent suit in his life? He doesn't care what the whole world thinks of him. He never did. I've told him a hundred times he ought to wear his good clothes when he goes out. Mother's told him the same thing. He just laughs. And now Grace may see him. Grace will meet him."
3. So young Harcourt stood still, with his head down, feeling that something very painful was impending. Once he looked anxiously at Grace, who had turned to the bargain counter. Among those people drifting aimlessly by with hot red faces, getting in each other's way, using their elbows but keeping their faces detached and wooden, she looked tall and splendidly alone. She was so sure of herself, her relation to the people in the aisles, the clerks behind the counters, the books on the shelves, and everything around her. Still keeping his head down and moving close, he whispered uneasily, "Let's go and have tea somewhere, Grace."
4. "In a minute, dear," she said.
5. "Let's go now."
6. "In just a minute, dear," she repeated absently.
7. "There's not a breath of air in here. Let's go now."

Reading Passages: 11th Grade

8. "What makes you so impatient?"
9. "There's nothing but old books on that counter."
10. "There may be something here I've wanted all my life," she said, smiling at him brightly and not noticing the uneasiness in his face.
11. So Harcourt had to move slowly behind her, getting closer to his father all the time. He could feel the space that separated them narrowing. Once he looked up with a vague, sidelong glance. But his father, red-faced and happy, was still reading the book, only now there was a meditative expression on his face, as if something in the book had stirred him and he intended to stay there reading for some time.
12. Old Harcourt had lots of time to amuse himself, because he was on a pension after working hard all his life. He had sent John to the university and he was eager to have him distinguish himself. Every night when John came home, whether it was early or late, he used to go into his father and mother's bedroom and turn on the light and talk to them about the interesting things that had happened to him during the day. They listened and shared this new world with him. They both sat up in their night clothes and, while his mother asked all the questions, his father listened attentively with his head cocked on one side and a smile or a frown on his face. The memory of all this was in John now, and there was also a desperate longing and a pain within him growing harder to bear as he glanced fearfully at his father, but he thought stubbornly, "I can't introduce him. It'll be easier for everybody if he doesn't see us. I'm not ashamed. But it will be easier. It'll be more sensible. It'll only embarrass him to see Grace." By this time he knew he was ashamed, but he felt that his shame was justified, for Grace's father had the smooth, confident manner of a man who had lived all his life among people who were rich and sure of themselves. Often when he had been in Grace's home talking politely to her mother, John had kept on thinking of the plainness of his own home and of his parents' laughing, good natured untidiness, and he resolved desperately that he must make Grace's people admire him.
13. He looked up cautiously, for they were about eight feet away from his father, but at that moment his father, too, looked up and John's glance shifted swiftly far over the aisle, over the counters, seeing nothing. As his father's blue, calm eyes stared steadily over the glasses, there was an instant when their glances might have met. Neither one could have been certain, yet John, as he turned away and began to talk hurriedly to Grace, knew surely that his father had seen him. He knew it by the steady calmness in his father's blue eyes. John's shame grew, and then humiliation sickened him as he waited and did nothing.
14. His father turned away, going down the aisle, walking erectly in his shabby clothes, his shoulders very straight, never once looking back. His father would walk slowly down the street, he knew, with that meditative expression deepening and becoming grave.
15. Young Harcourt stood beside Grace, brushing against her soft shoulder, and made faintly aware again of the delicate scent she used. There, so close beside him, she was holding within her everything he wanted to reach out for, only now he felt a sharp hostility that made him sullen and silent.

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16. "You were right, John," she was drawling in her soft voice. "It does get unbearable in here on a hot day. Do let's go now. Have you ever noticed that department stores after a time can make you really hate people?" But she smiled when she spoke, so he might see that she really hated no one.
17. "You don't like people, do you?" he said sharply.
18. "People? What people? What do you mean?"
19. "I mean," he went on irritably, "you don't like the kind of people you bump into here, for example."
20. "Not especially. Who does? What are you talking about?"
21. "Anybody could see you don't," he said recklessly, full of a savage eagerness to hurt her. "I say you don't like simple, honest people, the kind of people you meet all over the city." He blurted the words out as if he wanted to shake her, but he was longing to say, "You wouldn't like my family. Why couldn't I take you home to have dinner with them? You'd turn up your nose at them, because they've no pretensions. As soon as my father saw you, he knew you wouldn't want to meet him. I could tell by the way he turned."
22. His father was on his way home now, he knew, and that evening at dinner they would meet. His mother and sister would talk rapidly, but his father would say nothing to him, or to anyone. There would only be Harcourt's memory of the level look in the blue eyes, and the knowledge of his father's pain as he walked away.
23. Grace watched John's gloomy face as they walked through the store, and she knew he was nursing some private rage, and so her own resentment and exasperation kept growing, and she said crisply, "You're entitled to your moods on a hot afternoon, I suppose, but if I feel I don't like it here, then I don't like it. You wanted to go yourself. Who likes to spend very much time in a department store on a hot afternoon? I begin to hate every stupid person that bangs into me, everybody near me. What does that make me?"
24. "It makes you a snob."
25. "So I'm a snob now?" she asked angrily.
26. "Certainly you're a snob," he said. They were at the door and going out to the street. As they walked in the sunlight, in the crowd moving slowly down the street, he was groping for words to describe the secret thoughts he had always had about her. "I've always known how you'd feel about people I like who didn't fit into your private world," he said.
27. "You're a very stupid person," she said. Her face was flushed now, and it was hard for her to express her indignation, so she stared straight ahead as she walked along.
28. They had never talked in this way, and now they were both quickly eager to hurt each other. With a flow of words, she started to argue with him, then she checked herself and said calmly, "Listen, John, I imagine you're tired of my company. There's no sense in having tea together. I think I'd better leave you right here."
29. "That's fine," he said. "Good afternoon."

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30. "Good-by."
31. "Good-by."
32. She started to go, she had gone two paces, but he reached out desperately and held her arm, and he was frightened, and pleading, "Please don't go, Grace."
33. All the anger and irritation had left him; there was just a desperate anxiety in his voice as he pleaded, "Please forgive me. I've no right to talk to you like that. I don't know why I'm so rude or what's the matter. I'm ridiculous. I'm very, very ridiculous. Please, you must forgive me. Don't leave me."
34. He had never talked to her so brokenly, and his sincerity, the depth of his feeling, began to stir her. While she listened, feeling all the yearning in him, they seemed to have been brought closer together, by opposing each other, than ever before, and she began to feel almost shy. "I don't know what's the matter. I suppose we're both irritable. It must be the weather," she said. "But I'm not angry, John."
35. He nodded his head miserably. He longed to tell her that he was sure she would have been charming to his father, but he had never felt so wretched in his life. He held her arm tight, as if he must hold it or what he wanted most in the world would slip away from him, yet he kept thinking, as he would ever think, of his father walking away quietly with his head never turning.

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Common Threads

by Ana Veciana-Suarez

1. On a sweltering summer day, we head north from the southernmost tip of America in a caravan of cars loaded with all the accouterments needed for a family outing into the unknown. Somebody has brought a big thermos of *café con leche*, someone else several bakery boxes of guava pastries. In the cooler, cans of Coca-Cola and Materva grow cold. We are aiming for Parris Island, a spit of land in South Carolina where our country's few and proud are trained.
2. My nephew Juan Andres is graduating from Marine basic training. Seventeen and just out of a Catholic prep school, he'd never been away from home before. So for the past 13 weeks, as he has endured the toughest basic training dished out by any of the U.S. armed forces, the family in Miami—aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents—has made sure Juan Andres is the star of every barracks mail call.
3. Now a whole platoon of us—21 by actual count—are driving in a caravan up the long spine of Florida, through the red clay of Georgia and into the Carolina marshes. Notoriety precedes us. No other recruit, his drill sergeant notes, has had as many relatives attend the ceremony. We hope Juan Andres is as proud of us as we are of him. I have to admit, though, this clamoring crowd of *tías* and *tíos* chattering in Spanish does have the potential for embarrassment from a teenage recruit's point of view.
4. We've been told to dress casually and to wear red, the color of his battalion. Days before we left, I scrambled to make sure all of us would display a bright proclamation of this hue. Inspired by renewed patriotic fervor, we also brought little American flags.
5. The morning of the ceremony dawns hot and humid. In the motel lobby we gather for breakfast and discuss the day's strategy. Can we clap during the ceremony? Should we cheer? Shout out his name? Boost the younger children on our shoulders so they can admire their brave cousin as he marches by?
6. Heaven knows we don't want to do the wrong thing. Already, we have drawn attention during our overnight stay in the quaint little city of Beaufort. It was impossible to ignore the hard popping sound of our Cuban Spanish against the smooth, sweet Southern drawl that surrounded it.
7. In the midst of our discussion, I look across the lobby and spot my father. He squints into the distance, looking lost. He is wearing—oh, my God! No!—black nylon socks and inexpensive black rubber sandals with white Bermuda shorts and a paisley jersey shirt buttoned snugly against his ample belly. His legs are whiter than a Canadian tourist's. Tacky, and not even a touch of red.
8. "Is he in his underwear?" my husband whispers as he follows my stare. I'm speechless. I nudge my sister, who elbows my other sister, a chain reaction through my generation's stronghold.
9. "He *can't* go out like that," gasps one of us.

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10. We decide to mount an assault, but the ambush fails to persuade. He cannot understand why we think he needs to change.
11. “You’re wearing dress socks with sandals!” I sputter. “And those shorts look like your boxers.”
12. “But your mother picked out the clothes.” He stares at us, perplexed. “They’re brand-new. And they weren’t cheap either.”
13. I detect a whiff of aftershave, and something tightens hard across my chest. Suffering the embarrassment of parents is a verity of childhood, as inevitable as scraped knees and bent bicycles. It is doubly uncomfortable, however, when you are the child of immigrants, the prized possession of a well-meaning but clueless Mami and Papi who just don’t get it, and maybe never will.
14. I see my father in his ridiculous outfit and cringe, for this and all the mortifications of the past: The chaperons of my dating years. The hand-packed school lunches that smelled funny. The out-of-date haircuts given at home. The frilly dresses when I wanted jeans instead.
15. I’m forced out of my wallow by the need to rush off to grab seats in the bleachers for the big event. I watch as the old man who is my father struggles to get into the front seat of the rented van. I think I can hear his joints creak. He winces when my nephew Mikey shuts his door, but manages to pull himself up and straighten his shoulders. He pats down his hair, fiddles with his collar.
16. This is the same man who, many years earlier, fled Communist Cuba in the dark of night on a 14-foot boat, a man who gave up a stellar business career to start anew in freedom. A man who, long past retirement, still works seven days a week in the family marine business. A man who has always managed to soldier on bravely, no matter how alien or difficult the circumstances.
17. At the ceremony, the viewing stands undulate in Marine red and yellow. Though we strain to search for my nephew as the platoons file in, we can’t spot him in the perfectly starched and straight rows. All the soldier boys (and even the girls) look the same in their blue pants, khaki shirts and white caps—a dazzling display of uniformity. The band strikes up. My father bends forward to relieve the pain in his back, but even as he does, he holds his head high and smiles.
18. I know the precise measure of pride beating fervent and steady in his chest. It occurs to me that the distance between one old man in a ridiculous outfit that bales out its oddness and a young man in a uniform that blends in with blinding conformity is more than two generations. It is a long story of sacrifice and risk told countless times in our history, that of the immigrant and exile, the stranger in a strange land whose children and grandchildren become as American as frijoles. As American as Marines.

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Visual Representation from page 11

DO CLOTHES
really make
the **MAN?**



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for a candid discussion of

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