

The World of Short Stories

This activity is intended for you to discover the world of short stories. As you read the different texts, you have to construct meaning of these texts. To do so, you have to explore the text, establish personal connections or generalize beyond it. The readings presented in this activity are varied and they include a wide range of genres including science fiction, drama, memoir, mystery and suspense. The stories, written by authors from diverse cultures and time periods, were chosen to acquaint you with a varied selection of literature.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Read the stories.
- Select a short story.
- Take notes about the setting and the storyline.
- Give a clear context of the story.
- Identify and explain a personal or general connection.
- Rate the short story using the star rating system.

MORE PRECISION:

1. Give a clear context of the story:

In this section of your text, you have to put the reader in context and explain what elements are important to understand what is going on in the story or why such a character is acting in a way. Here is a sample of the questions you should answer:

- What does the title mean?
- What is the story about?
- What is the setting? (time and place)
- What words/clues are used to describe the setting?
- What literary genre is it?
- How do the main characters think?
- What underlying meanings are discussed in this story?

2. Identify and explain a personal or general connection:

In the second section of your text, you have to make a link to the text through your own or someone else's experience or move outside the context of the text and address issues at a broader, more general level. Here are possible questions you should answer to fulfill the task:

- How did the events/characters in this text remind you of something in your own life?
- Has anyone in your family experienced something like this? Who? What happened?
- How would you do it differently/better?
- How did the text make you feel?
- Do you know of any other places where this problem exists? Tell me about them.
- If you were asked to do something about this situation, what would you do?

The following model is a response on the theme of “talking dogs” from Chapter III of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (p. 20):

(1) In chapter III the three voices are tied together by the importance of dogs to the Kiowa. The storyteller emphasizes the early days before the Kiowa had acquired horses. This would be at the beginning of their journey before their contact with the Plains tribes. He emphasizes how closely the people used to live in contact with nature. The statement “That was a long time ago, when dogs could talk” emphasizes this close relationship. Early hunters and gatherers had to read and understand the behavior of animals in order to survive. Hunters today must be able to understand the “language” of dogs in order to understand their signals. Anyone who has ever hunted with a dog knows that man and dog do indeed “talk” to each other.

The historian points out how the Kiowa honored the importance and bravery of the dog by naming their principal Warrior Society “Real Dogs.”

After acquiring horses, the dog was not as important to the Kiowa, but Momaday, speaking in his own voice, comments on the number of dogs around his grandmother’s house, and shows the change in the role of the dog from protector, guardian and burden bearer to companion.

(2) When I was growing up on the farm, we always had English Shepherds, also known as Border Collies. These dogs were developed in Scotland for herding sheep. We had no sheep, but we did have cattle, and those little dogs were amazing at herding the cattle in for milking, branding, shipping, or moving from pasture to pasture. We communicated with the dogs by hand signals, whistles and words. We talked to the dogs and the dogs talked to us. When I was thirteen, my great uncle received a severe head injury while changing a tire on a car. The metal part blew off and struck him in the head. He suffered permanent brain injury and had to come live with us for the rest of his life. He loved to walk and would wander off down the country road. One of our old dogs, Nicki, appointed herself his guardian and accompanied him on all of his walks. She walked beside him, between him and any traffic, and if he wandered too far toward the center of the road, she gently “herded” him back to the side. If he became disoriented, Nicki would lead him home. The communication between that old dog and that old man, for me, mirrors the communication between the man and the dog in the Kiowa legend.

(3) Hunters, shepherds, cattle herders, all can attest to the importance of dogs in their work and the close communication that develops between man and dog. Even those who have only had dogs as pets have experienced the times their dog sensed their mood, shared their joy, or offered comfort in their sorrow. While not as important to survival to modern man as it was to the ancient Kiowa, the close relationship between human and dog still exists.

3. Rate the story using this 5-star rating system:

- *****: This story is one of my favorite stories. I would read the story often without getting tired. It is the best of its particular genre.
- **** : This story is still great, but it doesn’t make me smile quite as much, or it isn’t necessarily an exemplar of its genre.
- *** : There is a lot of literature that I think is good, but I wouldn’t read it too often.
- ** : I don’t enjoy the story all the time, but I would read it every once in a while for variety.
- * : It is a story that I don’t like. It’s just not my style. The story is still quality literature; it just doesn’t work for me.