

# INTRODUCTION TO INTERPRETIVE WORK

STUDENT READER



GRADE 8

Introduction to Argument:  
Writing About Literature

Grade 8

## Introduction to Interpretive Work



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**STUDENT READER**



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## Biographical Sketch

# Alice Walker

The daughter of sharecroppers, Alice Walker was born in 1944 in a rural farming community in Georgia. Growing up during an era of racial segregation, Walker attended the only high school available to Blacks. Her high marks there earned her not only the honor of valedictorian, but a full scholarship to university as well. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in New York in 1965.

Walker's lifelong commitment to social activism began in college where she devoted much of her energy to equal rights for both African Americans and women. While still in college, she met Martin Luther King, inspiring her to take part in the 1963 March on Washington and to return to the South where she worked to register Blacks to vote. Walker is also credited with coining the phrase "womanist"—a term advocating for women of color specifically.

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In 1967, Walker married a Jewish civil rights lawyer, and the couple became the first legally married interracial couple in Mississippi—and the target of the Ku Klux Klan as well.

Though she is the author of numerous, prize-winning poems, short stories, and books, Walker is best known for her 1982 novel *The Color Purple*, which won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The book was also made into a critically acclaimed film directed by Steven Spielberg and more recently, a Broadway musical.

“Everyday Use”—the story you will read in this unit—is from Walker’s anthology *In Love and Trouble*. The story is set in rural Georgia during the politically turbulent times of the late 1960s.

# Everyday Use

by Alice Walker

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for your grandmama

- 1           I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and  
I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A  
yard like this is more comfortable than most people  
know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended  
5           living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as  
a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined  
with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and  
sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the  
breezes that never come inside the house.  
10           Maggie will be nervous until after her sister  
goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners, homely  
and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and



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legs, eying her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that “no” is a word the world never learned to say to her.

You’ve no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has “made it” is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other’s faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

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40           In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with  
rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear  
flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the  
day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a  
man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can  
45 work outside all day, breaking ice to get water  
for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the  
open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the  
hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in  
the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer  
50 and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall.  
But of course all this does not show on television.  
I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a  
hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked  
barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright  
55 lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up  
with my quick and witty tongue.

          But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake  
up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue?  
Who can even imagine me looking a strange white  
60 man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to  
them always with one foot raised in flight, with my  
head turned in whichever way is the farthest from  
them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone  
in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.

65           “How do I look, Mama?” Maggie says, showing  
just enough of her thin body enveloped in a pink

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skirt and red blouse for me to know she's there,  
almost hidden by the door.

"Come out into the yard," I say.

70 Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a  
dog run over by some careless person rich enough  
to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant  
enough to be kind to him? That is the way my  
Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest,  
75 eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire  
that burned the other house to the ground.

Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair  
and a fuller figure. She's a woman now, though  
sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the  
80 other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes  
I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms  
sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress fall-  
ing off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes  
seem stretched open, blazed open by the flames  
85 reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off  
under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum  
out of; a look of concentration on her face as she  
watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall  
in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don't you  
90 do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask  
her. She had hated the house that much.

I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But  
that was before we raised the money, the church  
and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She

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95 used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies,  
other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting  
trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She  
washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us  
with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need  
100 to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way  
she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like  
dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy  
dress to wear to her graduation from high school;  
105 black pumps to match a green suit she'd made  
from an old suit somebody gave me. She was  
determined to stare down any disaster in her  
efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at  
a time. Often I fought off the temptation to shake  
110 her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and  
knew what style was.

I never had an education myself. After second  
grade the school was closed down. Don't ask me  
why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than  
115 they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She  
stumbles along good-naturedly but can't see well.  
She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and  
money, quickness passed her by. She will marry  
John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest  
120 face) and then I'll be free to sit here and I guess  
just sing church songs to myself. Although I never  
was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was

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always better at a man's job. I used to love to milk  
till I was hooked in the side in '49. Cows are sooth-  
125 ing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try  
to milk them the wrong way.

I have deliberately turned my back on the  
house. It is three rooms, just like the one that  
burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make  
130 shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows,  
just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes  
in a ship, but not round and not square, with raw-  
hide holding the shutters up on the outside. This  
house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No  
135 doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it  
down. She wrote me once that no matter where we  
"choose" to live, she will manage to come see us.  
But she will never bring her friends. Maggie and I  
thought about this and Maggie asked me, "Mama,  
140 when did Dee ever *have* any friends?"

She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hang-  
ing about on washday after school. Nervous girls  
who never laughed. Impressed with her they wor-  
shipped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the  
145 scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye.  
She read to them.

When she was courting Jimmy T she didn't  
have much time to pay to us, but turned all her  
faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a  
150 cheap city girl from a family of ignorant flashy  
people. She hardly had time to recompose herself.

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When she comes I will meet—but there they are!

155 Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. “Come back here,” I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

160 It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a  
165 kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. “Uhhnnh,” is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. “Uhhnnh.”

170 Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her  
175 shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go “Uhhnnh” again. It is her sister’s hair.

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180 It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtailed that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

“Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!” she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning and he follows up with “Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!” He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.

190 “Don’t get up,” says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie and the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

205 Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through motions with Maggie’s hand. Maggie’s hand is

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as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

"Well," I say. "Dee."

"No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

"What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

"She's dead." Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me."

"You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

"But who was *she* named after?" asked Wangero.

"I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

"And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. "That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

"Well," said Asalamalakim, "there you are."



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"Uhhnnh," I heard Maggie say.

"There I was not," I said, "before 'Dicie' cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?"

240 He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

"How do you pronounce this name?" I asked.

245 "You don't have to call me by it if you don't want to," said Wangero.

"Why shouldn't I?" I asked. "If that's what you want us to call you, we'll call you."

250 "I know it might sound awkward at first," said Wangero.

"I'll get used to it," I said. "Ream it out again."

Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three  
255 times he told me to just call him Hakim-a-barber. I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn't really think he was, so I didn't ask.

"You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road," I said. They said "Asalamalakim"  
260 when they met you, too, but they didn't shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of

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the herd the men stayed up all night with rifles in  
265 their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see  
the sight.

Hakim-a-barber said, "I accept some of their  
doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not  
my style." (They didn't tell me, and I didn't ask,  
270 whether Wangero (Dee) had really gone and mar-  
ried him.)

We sat down to eat and right away he said he  
didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero,  
though, went on through the chitlins and corn  
275 bread, the greens and everything else. She talked  
a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything  
delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the  
benches her daddy made for the table when we  
couldn't afford to buy chairs.

280 "Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-  
a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches  
are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, run-  
ning her hands underneath her and along the  
bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed  
285 over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she  
said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask  
you if I could have." She jumped up from the table  
and went over in the corner where the churn stood,  
the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the  
290 churn and looked at it.

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"This churn top is what I need," she said.  
"Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all  
used to have?"

"Yes," I said.

295 "Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the  
dasher, too."

"Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the  
barber.

Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

300 "Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dasher,"  
said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her.  
"His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

"Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero  
said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a center-  
305 piece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate  
over the churn, "and I'll think of something artistic  
to do with the dasher."

When she finished wrapping the dasher the  
handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my  
310 hands. You didn't even have to look close to see  
where hands pushing the dasher up and down to  
make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In  
fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see  
where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood.  
315 It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that  
grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had  
lived.

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After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

"Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?"

I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

"Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."

"No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."

"That'll make them last better," I said.

"That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear."

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345 She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

"Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts.

350 Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

"Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

355 "The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

She gasped like a bee had stung her.

360 "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

"I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

370 "But they're *priceless!*" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

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"She can always make some more," I said.

"Maggie knows how to quilt."

375 Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is these quilts, these quilts!"

"Well," I said, stumped. "What would you do with them?"

380 "Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts.

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

385 "She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

390 I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew  
395 God to work.

When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit

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400 of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I  
did something I never had done before: hugged  
Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room,  
snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands  
and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just  
405 sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

"Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

But she turned without a word and went out to  
Hakim-a-barber.

"You just don't understand," she said, as  
410 Maggie and I came out to the car.

"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

"Your heritage," she said. And then she turned  
to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try  
to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's  
415 really a new day for us. But from the way you and  
Mama still live you'd never know it."

She put on some sunglasses that hid everything  
above the tip of her nose and her chin.

420 Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But  
a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car  
dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of  
snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoy-  
ing, until it was time to go in the house and go to  
bed.

## Biographical Sketch

# Tomás Rivera

(1935-1984)

Tomás Rivera was a Chicano writer and educator. Born to migrant farmers, Rivera grew up working alongside his family in fields across the Midwest. Even in grade school, Rivera longed to be a writer—an aspiration that puzzled most of his family, but garnered the support of his grandfather, who kept him supplied with paper and pen and introduced him to the library.

Despite missing a considerable amount of school due to frequent moves and long days of work during harvest season, Rivera managed to become the first in his family to attend college, graduating from Southwest Texas State University in 1958 with a degree in English and minors in history, Spanish, and education.

Rivera taught high school English and Spanish while pursuing advanced degrees in the field



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of education. After receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma, Rivera taught at several universities before being named chancellor of the University of California, Riverside, in 1979, a position he held until his death.

In addition to poems, short stories, and scholarly work, Rivera is perhaps best known for his book *...y no se lo tragó la tierra (The Earth Did Not Devour Him)*, which received the first Premio Quinto Sol literary award to recognize and promote Chicano authors. “It’s That It Hurts”—the next story you will read in this unit—is one of the fourteen vignettes from this work.

Rivera left a legacy beyond his literary work. Schools, libraries, and community centers across the country bear his name as well as numerous scholarships and awards—all a testament to his advocacy for education and the Chicano community.

# It's That It Hurts

Tomás Rivera

"It's That It Hurts" is reprinted with permission from the publisher of . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra* by Tomás Rivera (© 1987 Arte Público Press – University of Houston.)

1           It hurts a lot. That's why I hit him. And now  
what do I do? Maybe they didn't expel me from  
school. Maybe it ain't so, after all. Maybe it's not.  
5           *Sure it is!* It is so, they did expel me. And now what  
do I do?

          I think it all started when I got so embarrassed  
and angry at the same time. I dread getting home.  
What am I going to tell Mother? And then when  
Dad gets home from the fields? They'll whip me for  
10          sure. But it's embarrassing and angering. It's always  
the same in these schools in the north. Everybody  
just stares at you up and down. And then they  
make fun of you and the teacher with her popsicle  
stick, poking your head for lice. It's embarrassing.

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15 And then when they turn up their noses it makes  
you angry. I think it's better staying out here on  
the ranch, here in the quiet of this knoll, with its  
chicken coops, or out in the fields where you at  
least feel more free, more at ease.

20 "Come on, so, we're almost there."  
"You gonna take me to the principal?"  
"Of course not. Don't tell me you don't  
know how to speak English yet. Look, that's the  
entrance over there. Just ask if you don't know  
25 where to go. Don't be shy, ask someone. Don't  
be afraid.  
"Why can't you go in with me?"  
"Don't tell me you're scared. Look, that's  
probably the entrance there. Here comes  
30 someone. Now, you behave, you hear me?"  
"But why don't you help me?"  
"No. You'll do just fine, don't be afraid."

It's always the same. They take you to the nurse  
and the first thing she does is check you for lice.  
35 And, too, those ladies are to blame. On Sundays  
they sit out front of the chicken coops picking lice  
from each other's heads. And the gringos, passing  
by in their cars, looking and pointing at them. Dad  
is right when he says that they look like monkeys in  
40 the zoo. But it's not all that bad.

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45 "Mother, you won't believe it. They took  
me out of the room. I had just walked in, and  
they put me in with a nurse all dressed in white.  
And they made me take off my clothes and they  
even examined my behind. But where they took  
the longest was on my head. I had washed it,  
right? Well, the nurse brought out a jar of, like  
vaseline, it smelled like worm-killer, do I still  
smell? And she smeared it all over my head.  
50 It itched. And then she started parting my hair  
with a pencil. After a while they let me go but  
I was so ashamed because I had to take off  
my pants, even my underwear, in front of the  
nurse."

55 But now what do I tell them? That they threw  
me out of school? But it wasn't all my fault. I didn't  
like that gringo, right off. This one didn't laugh at  
me. He'd just stare and when they put me in the  
corner apart from everyone he kept turning to  
60 look at me, and then he'd make a gesture with his  
finger. I was mad but mostly I felt embarrassed  
because I was sitting away from everyone where  
they could see me better. Then when it was my turn  
to read, I couldn't. I could hear myself. And I could  
65 hear that no words were coming out. . . .This cem-  
etry isn't scary at all. That's what I like best about  
the walk to school and back. The greenness! And

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everything so even. The roads all paved. It even  
looks like where they play golf. Today I won't have  
70 time to run up the hills and slide down tumbling.  
Nor to lie down on the grass and try to hear all  
the sounds. Last time I counted to 26. . . If I hurry  
maybe I can go to the dump with Doña Cuquita.  
She heads out about this time when the sun's not  
75 so hot.

“Careful, children. Just be careful and  
don't step where there's fire burning under-  
neath. Wherever you see smoke coming out,  
there's coals underneath. I know what I'm  
80 telling you, I once got a bad burn and I still  
have the scar. . . . Look, each of you get a long  
stick and just turn the trash over briskly. If the  
dump man comes to see what we're doing, tell  
him we came to throw away some stuff. He's  
85 a kind man, but he likes to keep those little  
books with nasty pictures that people some-  
times throw away. . . watch out for the train as  
you cross that bridge. It ran over a man last  
year. . . caught him right in the middle of the  
90 bridge and he wasn't able to make it to the  
other side. . . . Did they give you permission to  
come with me? . . . Don't eat anything until after  
you've washed it.

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95 But if I go with her without permission they'll  
whip me even more. What am I going to tell them?  
Maybe they didn't expel me. *Sure, they did!* Maybe  
not. *Yeah, they did!* What am I going to tell them?  
But it wasn't all my fault. I couldn't wait anymore.  
While I was standing there in the restroom he's the  
100 one that started picking on me.

"Hey, Mex. . . I don't like Mexicans because  
they steal. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"I don't like Mexicans. You hear, Mex?"

105 "Yes."

"I don't like Mexicans because they steal.  
You hear me?"

"Yes."

110 I remember the first fight I had at school, I  
got real scared because everything happened so  
slow. There wasn't any reason, it's just that some  
of the older boys who already had mustaches and  
who were still in the second grade started push-  
ing us against each other. And they kept it up until  
115 we started fighting. I think, 'cause we were plain  
scared. It was about a block from school, I remem-  
ber when they started pushing me towards Ramiro.  
Then we began to scuffle and hit each other. Some  
ladies came out and broke us up. Since then I got

## Introduction to Interpretive Work

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120 to feeling bigger. But all it was, up until I fought,  
was plain fear.

This time it was different. He didn't warn me.  
I just felt a real hard blow on my ear and I heard  
something like when you put a conch to your ear  
125 at the beach. I don't remember any more how or  
when I hit him but I know I did because someone  
told the principal that we were fighting in the rest-  
room. Maybe they didn't throw me out? *Sure they*  
*did!* And then, I wonder who called the principal?  
130 And the janitor all scared with his broom up in the  
air, ready to swat me if I tried to leave.

"The Mexican kid got into a fight and beat  
up a couple of our boys. . . .No, not bad. . .but  
what do I do?

135 ". . ."

"No, I guess not, they could care less if I  
expel him. . . .They need him in the fields."

". . ."

140 "Well, I just hope our boys don't make too  
much out about it to their parents. I guess I'll  
just throw him out.

". . ."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

". . ."

145 "I know you warned me, I know, I know. . .  
but. . .yeah, okay."

## It's That It Hurts

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But how could I even think of leaving knowing that everyone at home wanted me to go to school. Anyways the janitor stood with his broom up in the air ready for anything. . . And then they just told me to leave.

I'm halfway home. This cemetery is real pretty. It doesn't look anything like the one in Texas. That one *is* scary, I don't like it at all. What scares me the most is when we're leaving after a burial and I look up and I read the letters on the arch over that gate that say, *Don't forget me*. It's like I can hear all the dead people buried there saying these words and then the sound of these words stays in my mind and sometimes even if I don't look up when I pass through the gate, I still see them. But not this one, this one is real pretty. Just lots of soft grass and trees, I guess that's why here when people bury somebody they don't even cry. I like playing here. If only they would let us fish in the little creek that runs through here, there's lots of fish. But no, you even need a license to fish and then they don't even sell us one 'cause we're from out of state.

I won't be able to go to school anymore. What am I going to tell them? They've told me over and over that our teachers are like our second parents. . . and now? And when we get back to Texas everyone will find out too. Mother and Dad will be angry; I might get more than just a whipping. And



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175 then my uncle will find out and Grandpa. Maybe  
they might even send me to a reform school like  
the ones I've heard them talk about. There they  
turn you into a good person if you're bad. They're  
real hard on you. They leave you soft as a glove.  
180 But maybe they didn't expel me, *sure they did*,  
maybe not, *sure they did*. I could make like I'm  
going to school and stay here in the cemetery.  
That would be better. But then what? I could tell  
them that I lost my report card. And then what if I  
185 stay in the same grade? What hurt me the most is  
that now I won't be able to be a telephone opera-  
tor like Dad wants me to. You need to finish school  
for that.

190 "Vieja, call m'ijo out here. . . .look, *com-  
padre*, ask your godson what he wants to be  
when he grows up and finishes school."  
"What will you be, godson?"  
"I don't know."  
"Tell him! Don't be embarrassed. He's your  
195 godfather."  
"What will you be, son?"  
"A telephone operator."  
"Is that so?"  
"Yes, *compadre*, he's very determined, you  
200 know that? Every time we ask him he says he  
wants to be an operator. I think they pay well.

## It's That It Hurts

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I told the boss the other day and he laughed.  
I don't think he believes that my son can do  
it, but that's 'cause he doesn't know him. He's  
205 smarter than anything. I just pray God helps  
him finish school so he can become an opera-  
tor."

That movie was good. The operator was the  
most important one. Ever since then I suppose  
210 that's why Dad has wanted me to study for that  
after I finish school. But. . . maybe they didn't throw  
me out. What if it's not true? Maybe not. *Sure, it  
is.* What do I tell them? What do I do? Now they  
won't be able to ask me what I'm going to be when  
215 I grow up. Maybe not. *No, yeah.* What do I do? It's  
that it hurts and it's embarrassing at the same time.  
I better just stay here. No, but then Mother will get  
scared like she does when there's lightning and  
thunder. I've gotta tell them. And when my *padrino*  
220 comes to visit us I'll just hide. No need for him to  
find out. Nor for me to read to him like Dad has  
me do every time he comes to visit us. What I'll do  
when he comes is hide behind the chest or under  
the bed. That way Dad and Mother won't feel  
225 embarrassed. And what if I really wasn't expelled?  
Maybe I wasn't? *No, yeah.*