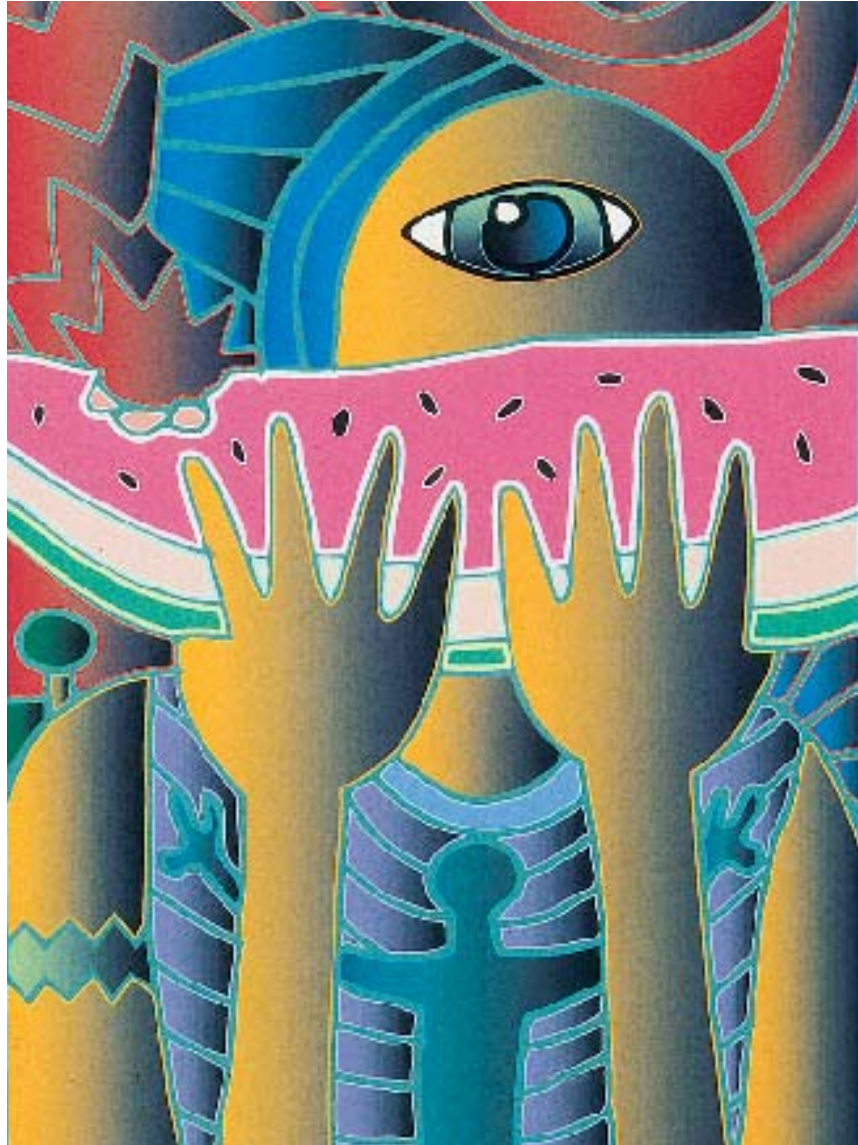


The Taste of Melon

BORDEN DEAL



Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- relate your own experience to the story theme
- analyse story structure
- identify changes in the narrator's perspective
- interpret characters' motives

When I think of the summer I was sixteen, a lot of things some crowding in to be thought about. We had moved just the year before, and sixteen is still young enough that the bunch makes a difference. I had a bunch, all right, but they weren't sure of me yet. I didn't know why. Maybe because I'd lived in town, and my father still worked there instead of farming, like the other fathers did. The boys I knew, even Freddy Gray and J.D., still kept a small distance between us.

Then there was Willadean Wills. I hadn't been much interested in girls before. But I had to admit to myself that I was interested in Willadean. She was my age, nearly as tall as I, and up till the year before, Freddy Gray told me, she had been good at playing Gully Keeper and Ante-Over. But she didn't play such games this year. She was tall and slender, and Freddy Gray and J.D. and I had several discussions about the way she walked. I maintained she was putting it on, but J.D. claimed she couldn't help it. Freddy Gray remarked that she hadn't walked that way last year. He said she'd walked like any other human being. So then I said, put on or not, I liked the way she walked, and then there was a large silence.

It wasn't a comfortable silence, because of Mr. Wills, Willadean's father. We were all afraid of Mr. Wills.

Mr. Wills was a big man. He had bright, fierce eyes under heavy brows and, when he looked down at you, you just withered. The idea of having him directly and immediately angry at one of us was enough to shrivel the soul. All that summer Willadean walked up and down the high road or sat on their front porch in a rocking chair, her dress flared out around her, and not one of us dared to do more than say good morning to her.

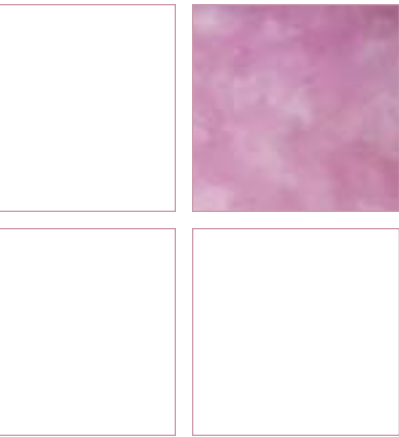
Mr. Wills was the best farmer in the community. My father said he could drive a stick into the ground and grow a tree out of it. But it wasn't an easy thing with him; Mr. Wills fought the earth when he worked it. When he ploughed his fields, you could hear him yelling for a mile. It was as though he dared the earth not to yield him its sustenance.

Above all, Mr. Wills could raise watermelons. Now, watermelons are curious things. Some men can send off for the best watermelon seed, they can plant it in the best ground they own, they can hoe it and tend it with the greatest of care, and they can't raise a melon bigger than your two fists. Other men, like Mr. Wills, can throw seed on the ground, scuff dirt over it, walk off and leave it, and have a crop of the prettiest, biggest melons you ever saw.

Mr. Wills always planted the little field directly behind his barn to watermelons. It ran from the barn to the creek, a good piece of land with just the right sandy soil for melon raising. And it seemed as though the melons just bulged up out of the ground for him.

But they were Mr. Wills's melons; he didn't have any idea of sharing them with the boys of the neighbourhood. He was fiercer about his melons than anything else; if you just happened to walk close to his melon patch, you'd see Mr. Wills standing and watching you with a glower on his face. And likely as not he'd have his gun under his arm.

Everybody expected to lose a certain quantity of their watermelons to ter-rapins and a certain quantity to boys. It wasn't considered stealing to sneak into a man's melon patch and judiciously borrow a sample of his raising.



You might get a load of salt in the seat of your pants if you were seen, but that was part of the game. You'd be looked down on only if you got malicious and stamped a lot of melons into the ground while you were about it. But Mr. Wills didn't think that way.

That summer I was sixteen Mr. Wills raised the greatest watermelon ever seen in the country. It grew in the very middle of his patch, three times as big as any melon anybody had ever seen. Men came from miles around to look at it. Mr. Wills wouldn't let them go into the melon patch. They had to stand around the edge.

Just like all other daredevil boys in that country, I guess, Freddy Gray and J.D. and I had talked idly about stealing that giant watermelon. But we all knew that it was just talk. Not only were we afraid of Mr. Wills and his rages but we knew that Mr. Wills sat in the hayloft window of his barn every night with his shotgun, guarding the melon. It was his seed melon. He meant to plant next year's crop out of that great one and maybe raise a whole field of them. Mr. Wills was in a frenzy of fear that somebody would steal it. Why, he would rather you stole Willadean than his melon. At least, he didn't guard Willadean with his shotgun.

Every night I could sit on our front porch and see Mr. Wills sitting up there in the window of his hayloft, looking fiercely out over his melon patch. I'd sit there by the hour and watch him, the shotgun cradled in his arm, and feel the tremors of fear and excitement chasing up and down my spine.

"Look at him," my father would say. "Scared to death somebody will steal his seed melon. Wouldn't anybody steal a man's seed melon."

"He ought to be in the house taking care of that wife of his," my mother would say tartly. "She's been poorly all year."

You hardly ever saw Mrs. Wills. She was a wraith of a woman, pale as a butter bean. Sometimes she would sit for an hour or two on their porch in the cool of the day. They didn't visit back and forth with anybody though.

"There's Willadean," my father would say mildly.

My mother would make a funny kind of sound that meant disgust. "He cares more about that seed melon than he does his wife," she'd say. "I wish somebody *would* steal it. Maybe then—"

"Helen," my father would say, chiding, "you shouldn't even think of such a thing."

About the time the great watermelon was due to come ripe, there was a night of a full moon. J.D. and Freddy Gray and I had decided we'd go swimming in the creek, so I left the house when the moon rose and went to meet them. The moon floated up into the sky, making everything almost as bright as day, but at the same time softer and gentler than ever daylight could be. It was the kind of night when you feel as though you can do any-

thing in the world, even boldly asking Willadean Wills for a date. On a night like that, you couldn't help but feel that she'd gladly accept.

"Boy, what a moon!" J.D. said when I met them.

"Wouldn't you like to take old Willadean out on a night like this?" Freddy Gray said.

We scoffed at him, but secretly in our hearts we knew how he felt. We were getting old enough to think that that sort of thing might be a lot more fun than going swimming in the moonlight.

As I said before, I was part of the bunch. J.D. and Freddy Gray were my good friends. But because I was still new, there were certain things and certain feelings where I was left out. This was one of them; they were afraid, because I was more of a stranger to Willadean, that she might like the idea of dating me better than she did either of them. This was all way down under the surface, because none of us had admitted to ourselves that we wanted to be Willadean's boyfriend. But far down though it was, I could feel it, and they could feel it.

"I wish I had a newspaper," I said then. "I'll bet you could read it in this moonlight."

We had reached the swimming hole in the creek, and we began shucking off our clothes. We were all excited by the moonlight, yelling at one another and rushing to be first into the water. Freddy Gray made it first, J.D. and I catapulting in right behind him. The water was cold, and the shock of it struck a chill into us. But we got rid of it by a brisk water fight and then we were all right.

We climbed out finally, to rest, and sat on the bank. That big old moon sailed serenely overhead, climbing higher into the sky, and we lay on our backs to look up at it.

"Old Man Wills won't have to worry about anybody stealing his melon tonight, anyway," Freddy Gray said. "Wouldn't anybody dare try it, bright as day like it is."

"He's not taking any chances," J.D. said. "I saw him sitting up in that hayloft when I came by, his shotgun loaded with buckshot. That melon is as safe as it would be in the First National Bank."

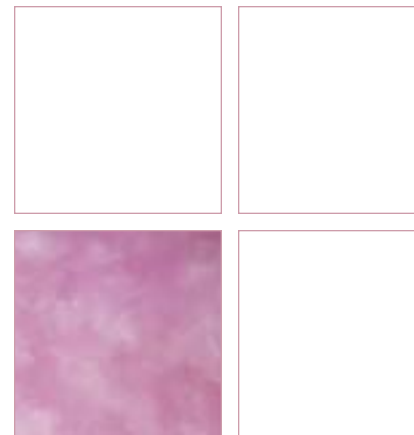
"Shucks," I said in a scoffing voice, "he ain't got buckshot in that gun. He's just got a load of salt, like anybody else guarding a watermelon patch."

Freddy Gray sat upright, looking at me. "Don't kid yourself, son," he said loftily. "He told my daddy that he had it loaded with double-ought buckshot."

"Why," I said, "that would kill a man."

"That's what he's got in mind," Freddy Gray said, "if anybody goes after that seed melon."

It disturbed me more than it should have. After all, I'd never had it in



mind to try for the melon, had I? "I don't believe it," I said flatly. "He wouldn't kill anybody over a watermelon. Even a seed melon like that one."

"Old Man Wills would," J.D. said.

Freddy Gray was still watching me. "What's got you into such a swivet?" he said. "You weren't planning on going after that melon yourself?"

"Well, yes," I said. "As a matter of fact, I was."

There was a moment of respectful silence. Even from me. I hadn't known I was going to say those words. To this day I don't know why I said them. It was all mixed up with Willadean and the rumour of Mr. Wills having his gun loaded with double-ought buckshot and the boys still thinking of me as an outsider. It surged up out of me—not the idea of making my name for years to come by such a deed, but the feeling that there was a rightness in defying the world and Mr. Wills.

Mixed up with it all there came into my mouth the taste of watermelon. I could taste the sweet red juices oozing over my tongue, feel the delicate threaded redness of the heart as I squeezed the juices out of it.

I stood up. "As a matter of fact," I said, "I'm going after it right now."

"Wait a minute," J.D. said in alarm. "You can't do it on a moonlight night like this. It's 200 yards from the creekbank to that melon. He'll see you for sure."

"Yeah," Freddy Gray said, "wait until a dark night. Wait until—"

"Anybody could steal it on a dark night," I said scornfully. "I'm going to take it right out from under his nose. Tonight."

I began putting on my clothes. My heart was thudding in my chest. I didn't taste watermelon any more; I tasted fear. But it was too late to stop now. Besides, I didn't want to stop.

We dressed silently, and I led the way up the creekbank. We came opposite the watermelon patch and ducked down the bank. We pushed through the willows on the other side and looked toward the barn. We could see Mr. Wills very plainly. The gun was cradled in his arms, glinting from the moonlight.

"You'll never make it," J.D. said in a quiet, fateful voice. "He'll see you before you're six steps away from the creek."

"You don't think I mean to walk, do you?" I said.

I pushed myself out away from them, on my belly in the grass that grew up around the watermelon hills. I was absolutely flat, closer to the earth than I thought it was possible to get. I looked back once, to see their white faces watching me out of the willows.

I went on, stopping once in a while to look cautiously up toward the barn. He was still there, still quiet. I met a terrapin taking a bite out of a small melon. Terrapins love watermelon, better than boys do. I touched him on the shell and whispered, "Hello, brother," but he didn't acknowl-



edge my greeting. He just drew into his shell. I went on, wishing I was equipped like a terrapin for the job, outside as well as inside.

It seemed to take forever to reach the great melon in the middle of the field. With every move, I expected Mr. Wills to see me. Fortunately the grass was high enough to cover me. At last the melon loomed up before me, deep green in the moonlight, and I gasped at the size of it. I'd never seen it so close.

I lay still for a moment, panting. I didn't have the faintest idea how to get it out of the field. Even if I'd stood up, I couldn't have lifted it by myself. A melon is the slipperiest, most cumbersome object in the world. And this was the largest I'd ever seen. It was not a long melon, but a fat round one. Besides, I didn't dare stand up.

For five minutes I didn't move. I lay there, my nostrils breathing up the smell of the earth and the musty smell of the watermelon vines, and I wondered why I was out here in the middle of all that moonlight on such a venture. There was more to it than just bravado. I was proving something to myself—and to Mr. Wills and Willadean.

I thought of a tempting way out then. I would carve my name into the deep greenness of the melon. Mr. Wills would see it the next morning when he inspected the melon, and he would know that I could have stolen it if I'd wanted to. But no—crawling to the melon wasn't the same thing as actually taking it.

I reached one hand around the melon and found the stem. I broke the tough stem off close against the smooth roundness, and I was committed. I looked toward the barn again. All quiet. I saw Mr. Wills stretch and yawn, and his teeth glistened; the moon was that bright and I was that close.

I struggled around behind the melon and shoved at it. It rolled over sluggishly, and I pushed it again. It was hard work, pushing it down the trough my body had made through the grass. Dust rose up around me, and I wanted to sneeze. My spine was crawling with the expectation of a shot. Surely he'd see that the melon was gone out of its accustomed space.

It took about a hundred years to push that melon out of the field. I say that advisedly, because I felt that much older when I finally reached the edge. With the last of my strength I shoved it into the willows and collapsed. I was still lying in the edge of the field.

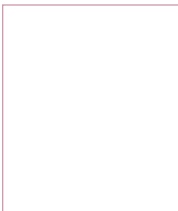
"Come on," Freddy Gray said, his voice pleading. "He's—"

I couldn't move. I turned my head. He was standing up to stretch and yawn to his content, and then he sat down again. By then I was rested enough to move again. I snaked into the willows, and they grabbed me.

"You did it!" they said. "By golly, you did it!"

There was no time to bask in their admiration and respect. "Let's get it on out of here," I said. "We're not safe yet."

We struggled the melon across the creek and up the bank. We started



toward the swimming hole. It took all three of us to carry it, and it was hard to get a grip. J.D. and Freddy Gray carried the ends, while I walked behind the melon, grasping the middle. We stumbled and thrashed in our hurry, and we nearly dropped it three or four times. It was the most difficult object I'd ever tried to carry in my life.

At last we reached the swimming hole and sank down, panting. But not for long; the excitement was too strong in us. Freddy Gray reached out a hand and patted the great melon.

"By golly," he said, "there it is. All ours."

"Let's bust it and eat it before somebody comes," J.D. said.

"Wait a minute," I said. "This isn't just any old melon. This is old man Wills's seed melon, and it deserves more respect than to be busted open with a fist. I'm going to cut it."

I took out my pocketknife and looked at it dubiously. It was small, and the melon was big. We really needed a butcher knife. But when the little knife penetrated the thick green rind, the melon split of itself, perfectly down the middle. There was a ragged, silken, tearing sound, and it lay open before us.

The heart meat, glistening with sweet moisture, was grained with white sugar specks. I tugged at it with two fingers, and a great chunk of the meat came free. I put it into my mouth, closing my eyes. The melon was still warm from the day's sun. Just as in my anticipation, I felt the juice trickle into my throat, sweet and seizing. I had never tasted watermelon so delicious.

The two boys were watching me savour the first bite. I opened my eyes. "Dive in," I said graciously. "Help yourselves."

We gorged ourselves until we were heavy. Even then, we had still only eaten the heart meat, leaving untouched more than we had consumed. We gazed with sated eyes at the leftover melon, still good meat peopled with a multitude of black seeds.

"What are we going to do with it?" I said.

"There's nothing we can do," J.D. said. "I can just see us taking a piece of this melon home for the folks."

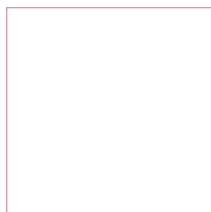
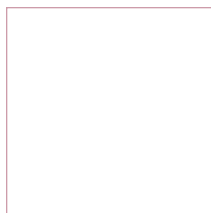
"It's eat it or leave it," Freddy Gray said.

We were depressed suddenly. It was such a waste, after all the struggle and the danger, that we could not eat every bite. I stood up, not looking at the two boys, not looking at the melon.

"Well," I said. "I guess I'd better get home."

"But what about this?" J.D. said insistently, motioning toward the melon.

I kicked half the melon, splitting it in three parts. I stamped one of the chunks under my foot. Then I set methodically to work, destroying the rest of the melon. The boys watched me silently until I picked up a chunk of rind and threw it at them. Then they swept into the destruction also, and we



were laughing again. When we stopped, only the battered rinds were left, the meat muddied on the ground, the seed scattered.

We stood silent, looking at one another. "There was nothing else to do," I said and they nodded solemnly.

But the depression went with us toward home and, when we parted, we did so with sober voices and gestures. I did not feel triumph or victory, as I had expected, though I knew that tonight's action had brought me closer to my friends than I had ever been before.

"Where have you been?" my father asked as I stepped up on the porch. He was sitting in his rocker.

"Swimming," I said.

I looked toward Mr. Wills's barn. The moon was still high and bright, but I could not see him. My breath caught in my throat when I saw him in the field, walking toward the middle. I stood stiffly, watching him. He reached the place where the melon should have been. I saw him hesitate, looking around, then he bent, and I know he was looking at the depression in the earth where the melon had lain. He straightened, a great strangled cry tearing out of his throat. It chilled me deep down and all the way through, like the cry of a wild animal.

My father jerked himself out of the chair, startled by the sound. He turned in time to see Mr. Wills lift the shotgun over his head and hurl it from him, his voice crying out again in a terrible, surging yell of pain and anger.

"Lord, what's the matter?" my father said.

Mr. Wills was tearing up and down the melon patch, and I was puzzled by his actions. Then I saw, he was destroying every melon in the patch. He was breaking them open with his feet, silent now, concentrating on his frantic destruction. I was horrified by the awful sigh, and my stomach moved sickly.

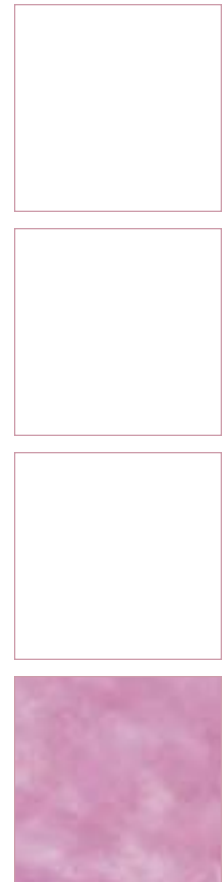
My father stood for a moment, watching him, then he jumped off the porch and ran toward Mr. Wills. I followed him. I saw Mrs. Wills and Willadean huddled together in the kitchen doorway. My father ran into the melon patch and caught Mr. Wills by the arm.

"What's come over you?" he said. "What's the matter, man?"

Mr. Wills struck his grip away. "They've stolen my seed melon," he yelled. "They took it right out from under me."

My father grabbed him with both arms. He was a brave man, for he was smaller than Mr. Wills, and Mr. Wills looked insane with anger, his teeth gripped over his lower lip, his eyes gleaming furiously. Mr. Wills shoved my father away, striking at him with his fist. My father went down into the dirt. Mr. Wills didn't seem to notice. He went back to his task of destruction, raging up and down the field, stamping melons large and small.

My father got up and began to chase him. But he didn't have a chance.



Every time he got close, Mr. Wills would sweep his great arm and knock him away again. At last Mr. Wills stopped of his own accord. He was standing on the place where the great melon had grown. His chest was heaving with great sobs of breath. He gazed about him at the destruction he had wrought, but I don't think that he saw it.

"They stole my seed melon," he said. His voice was quieter now than I had ever heard it. I had not believed such quietness was in him. "They got it away, and now it's gone."

I saw that tears stood on his cheeks, and I couldn't look at him any more. I'd never seen a grown man cry, crying in such strength.

"I had two plans for that melon," he told my father. "Mrs. Wills has been poorly all the spring, and she dearly loves the taste of melon for eating, and my melon for planting. She would eat the meat, and the next spring I would plant the seeds for the greatest melon crop in the world. Every day she would ask me if the great seed melon was ready yet."

I looked toward the house. I saw the two women, the mother and the daughter, standing there. I couldn't bear any more. I fled out of the field toward the sanctuary of my house. I ran past my mother, standing on the porch, and went into my room.

I didn't sleep that night. I heard my father come in, heard the low-voiced conversation with my mother, heard them go to bed. I lay wide-eyed and watched the moon through the window as it slid slowly down the sky and at last brought a welcome darkness into the world.

I don't know all the things I thought that night. Mostly it was about the terrible thing I had committed so lightly, out of pride and out of being sixteen years old and out of wanting to challenge the older man, the man with the beautiful daughter.

That was the worst of all, that I had done it so lightly, with so little thought of its meaning. In that country and in that time, watermelon stealing was not a crime. It was tolerated, laughed about. The men told great tales of their own watermelon-stealing days, how they'd been set on by dogs and peppered with salt-loaded shotgun shells. Watermelon raiding was a game, a ritual of defiance and rebellion by young males. I could remember my own father saying, "No melon tastes as sweet as a stolen one," and my mother laughing and agreeing.

But stealing this great seed melon from a man like Mr. Wills lay outside the safe magic of the tacit understanding between man and boy. And I knew that it was up to me, at whatever risk, to repair as well as I could the damage I had done.

When it was daylight I rose from my bed and went out into the fresh world. It would be hot later on; but now the air was dew-cool and fragrant. I had found a paper sack in the kitchen, and I carried it in my hand as I

walked toward the swimming hole. I stopped there, looking down at the wanton waste we had made of the part of the melon we had not been able to eat. It looked as though Mr. Wills had been stamping here too.

I knelt down on the ground, opened the paper sack and began picking up the black seeds. They were scattered thickly, still stringy with watermelon pulp, and soon my hands were greasy with them. I kept on doggedly, searching out every seed I could find, until at the end I had to crawl over the ground, seeking for the last ones.

They nearly filled the paper sack. I went back to the house. By the time I reached it, the sun and my father had risen. He was standing on the porch.

"What happened to you last night?" he said. "Did you get so frightened you had to run home? It was frightening to watch him, I'll admit that."

"Father," I said, "I've got to go talk to Mr. Wills. Right now. I wish you would come with me."

He stopped, watching me. "What's the matter?" he said. "Did you steal that seed melon of his?"

"Will you come with me?" I said.

His face was dark and thoughtful. "Why do you want me?"

"Because I'm afraid he'll shoot me," I said. My voice didn't tremble much, but I couldn't keep it all out.

"Then why are you going?" he said.

"Because I've got to," I said.

My father watched me for a moment. "Yes," he said quietly, "I guess you do." He came down the steps and stood beside me. "I'll go with you," he said.

We walked the short distance between our house and his. Though it was so near, I had never been in his yard before. I felt my legs trembling as I went up the brick walk and stood at the bottom of the steps, the paper sack in my hand. I knocked on the porch floor, and Willadean came to the screen door.

I did not look at her. "I want to talk to your father."

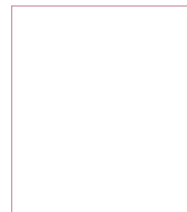
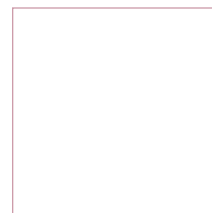
She stared at me for a moment, then she disappeared. In a moment Mr. Wills appeared in the doorway. His face was marked by the night, his cheeks sunken, his mouth bitten in. He stared at me absent-mindedly, as though I were only a speck in his thinking.

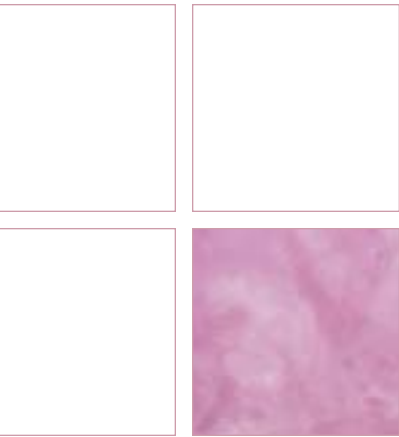
"What do you want, boy?" he said.

I felt my teeth grit against the words I had to say. I held out the paper bag toward him.

"Mr. Wills," I said, "here's the seeds from your seed melon. That's all I could bring back."

I could feel my father standing quietly behind me. Willadean was standing in the doorway, watching. I couldn't take my eyes away from Mr. Wills's face.





"Did you steal it?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

He advanced to the edge of the porch. The shotgun was standing near the door, and I expected him to reach for it. Instead he came toward me, a great powerful man, and leaned down to me.

"Why did you steal it?" he said.

"I don't know," I said.

"Didn't you know it was my seed melon?"

"Yes sir," I said. "I knew it."

He straightened up again and his eyes were beginning to gleam. I wanted to run, but I couldn't move.

"And my sick wife hungered for the taste of that melon," he said. "Not for herself, like I thought. But to invite the whole neighbourhood in for a slice of it. She knew I wouldn't ever think of anything like that myself. She hungered for that."

I hung my head. "I'm sorry," I said.

He stopped still then, watching me. "So you brought me the seeds," he said softly. "That's not much, boy."

I lifted my head. "It's was all I could think to do," I said. "The melon is gone. But the seeds are next year. That's why I brought them to you."

"But you ruined this year," he said.

"Yes, sir," I said. "I ruined this year."

I couldn't look at him any more. I looked at Willadean standing behind him. Her eyes were a puzzle, watching me, and I couldn't tell what she was thinking or feeling.

"I'm about as ashamed of myself last night as you are of yourself," Mr. Wills said. He frowned at me with his heavy brows. "You ruined the half of it, and I ruined the other. We're both to blame, boy. Both to blame."

It seemed there ought to be something more for me to say. I searched for it in my mind and discovered only the thought that I had found this morning in the grey light of dawning.

"The seeds are next year." I said. I looked at him humbly. "I'll help you plant them, Mr. Wills. I'll work very hard."

Mr. Wills looked at my father for the first time. There was a small hard smile on his face, and his eyes didn't look as fierce as they had before.

"A man with a big farm like mine needs a son," he said. "But Willadean here was all the good Lord saw fit to give me. Sam, I do wish I had me a boy like that."

He came close to me then, put his hand on my shoulder. "We can't do anything about this year," he said. "But we'll grow next year, won't we? We'll grow it together."

"Yes, sir," I said.

I looked past him at Willadean, and her eyes were smiling too. I felt my heart give a great thump in my chest.

"And you don't have to offer the biggest melon in the world to get folks to come visiting," I blurted. "Why, I'll set on the porch with Willadean any time."

Mr. Wills and my father burst out laughing. Willadean was blushing red in the face. But somehow she didn't look mad. Flustered, I began to beat a retreat toward the gate. Then I stopped, looking back at Mr. Wills, I couldn't leave yet.

"Can I ask you one thing, Mr. Wills?" I said.

He stopped laughing, and there was no fierceness in his voice. "Anything you want to, boy," he said.

"Well, I just wanted to know," I said. "Was there double-ought buckshot in that gun?"

He reached around and picked up the gun. He unbreeched it and took out a shell. He broke the shell in his strong fingers and poured the white salt out into his palm.

"You see?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said, taking a deep breath. "I see."

I went on then, and the next year started that very day. ■

Activities

1. Have you ever done anything you knew was wrong in order to fit in or be admired? Write about the experience, and what you learned from it.
2. **a)** Identify two moments of climax in the story.
b) How would the story be different if the author had chosen to end it sooner? Identify a possible ending point for the story. What do the scenes that follow add to the plot? Discuss which ending you prefer, and why.
3. Since the narrator relates the events of the story as they unfold, there is a difference between his imaginary picture of Mr. Wills at the outset, and the real Mr. Wills revealed at the end. Chart the differences between the imaginary and the real Mr. Wills, using quotations from the story.
4. **a)** The melon represents many different things to different characters in the story. In groups of three, choose one of the characters and discuss what the melon means to him or her.
b) Create a monologue in which the character you have chosen expresses his feelings about the melon. Form new groups, and take turns presenting your monologues. Provide constructive feedback on each other's delivery, language, and character portrayal.

I WAS A TEENAGE INGÉNUÉ

Undercover at Canada's National Bimbo Rag

LEAH ROSS

Focus Your Learning

Reading this article will help you:

- analyse the writer's viewpoint
- explore language use in popular culture
- identify the characteristics of magazines
- produce a magazine

So, like, there we were! Six totally wired teens, selected from like kajillions of other girls to be the Teen Advisory Council for Maclean Hunter's new teen rag, *Ingénue*. Ohmigod, I was sooo excited!

So, editor Kara Lee Smart bounces into the room on platform shoes and goes, "Hi-eee!" And all us girls are like "Hi-eee!" back. Then she passes around all these pictures of chronically *hot* guys and she's like, "These are the male models we're considering for our next fashion shoot and I want you guys to rate them from one to 10."

I am not joking—it was the hardest decision of my life. Eventually, I had to go with the brunette straddling a motorcycle.

After that, it was out for a power lunch at the restaurant of our choice (Lime Rickey's). Then we went to the Maclean Hunter corporate offices to meet our real boss, Fatima. She told us she was the executive assistant to the president.

For the rest of the summer, Fatima was going to be kind of like our camp counsellor. You know, she'd take us out shopping and let us play with the fax machine and stuff. On the

first day she showed us our office. It was like this really big sunny room with a long desk and this little computer that you didn't even have to plug in. Cool!

Then we met this old dude who was like the president of Maclean Hunter for all of Canada. We hung in his office for a bit and he told us about golf and the importance of advertising and stuff. He was a pretty rad guy (minus the loafers).

Later on we went back to our office to do some paperwork. Kara had given us these reader surveys to fill out. They were photocopied from the latest issue of *Seventeen*. The questions were like: "What's your fave piece of clothing and where'd you get it?" It wasn't very hard, not like school or anything. But then there was this one question: "If you were stranded on a desert island and you could only have one beauty product, which one would you choose?"

I was totally stumped so I asked the girl behind me what she put. She goes, "Tough call, but I went with Revlon Summer Peach Lipliner."

I wrote down, "Does a canoe count as a beauty product???"

Such was my first day on the job. Working on *Ingénue's* Teen Advisory Council was, to put it mildly, not what I had expected. The job description in the ad had been vague—it called for a few teenage girls to work for the summer on a new teen magazine set to launch in the fall. We were asked to submit a short essay describing "Why I am perfect for this job."

I wrote about how the majority of magazines targeted to young women—like *Seventeen* and *YM*—are a bunch of Barbie Doll dreck that seek nothing more than to sell warped ideals of beauty and romance to vulnerable minds. These ideals serve one purpose: They sell the

products advertised within the magazine. A survey of "What boys like" runs beside an ad for Clearasil—first, diminish self-esteem, then offer a cure available at your local drugstore.

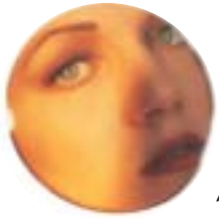
Apparently the *Ingénue* creators liked what I had to say, since they hired me. But what they hired me to do was a mystery. A few weeks into the job, our duties and responsibilities as the teen council were still murky. Either no one had bothered to think of any, or there simply were none. I suppose it was the kind of job that many people dream of, but I quickly got bored with reading the July issue of *Flare* over and over again.

You see, I had imagined that the *Ingénue* job would be something along the lines of *Sassy* magazine's annual reader-produced issue, which includes articles written by young women on issues like date rape and body image. I was eager to have a role in the making of Canada's first mainstream teen magazine.

Most of the other girls' interests lay in fashion and beauty, but I wanted to have some editorial input. I had ideas for a column about underground teen culture and feature articles that would make current political issues accessible and applicable to teenage girls. I don't mean to moralize or anything, but I wanted to excite the substance-starved minds of my peers by creating a magazine that didn't try to pacify or patronize young women. (Forget Revlon, we need *revolution!*)

And I figured I was in a good position to do it. All through my adolescence I was lucky enough to be exposed to a huge range of reading materials—from *The New Yorker* and *Ms.* to quirky underground comics and independent music zines. I'm lucky because my parents





encouraged me to read whatever I wanted from day one. I'm also lucky because I attended a high school for the performing arts, where the word "freak" didn't exist in my friends' vocabularies.

But as a teen council member at *Ingénue*, my eclectic tastes didn't seem to count. I had been hired as a typical teen with typical interests; the kind of girl who follows *The Young and the Restless* and dreams of nothing more than having a nice boyfriend. My job, in short, was to be this girl.

Over the first couple of weeks, the teen council was led on a seemingly endless tour of the Maclean Hunter offices. We met the white men in suits in the corporate offices, the brown-skinned women in customer service, and the harried-looking staff in the newsrooms. Each time we arrived on a new floor, Fatima would find someone—an editor, a secretary, or a photocopier repairman—and, regardless of what they were doing, direct them to take us on a guided tour of the office in question. Most employees smiled charmingly at Fatima and reluctantly led us around for a while. In the meantime, Fatima scooted back to her own office, returned some phone calls, arranged a few meetings, and was back in time to deliver us to the next department.

A question began to arise: "What the heck are we doing here?"

"Just learning a little bit about the publishing industry so we can put your talents to use," Fatima assured everyone. I was sceptical. The tours continued.

Sometime during the second week we met with Brian Segal, the publisher of *Maclean's*. We knew he was a bigwig because we actually had to make an appointment. So there we were, all six of us, sitting in his office when he cheerfully

asked, "So how do you kids like the name of the magazine? It took everyone a long time to decide on *Ingénue* and I think it's fabulous."

A couple of my fellow council members murmured things like, "Cool!" and, "Very French."

I had been waiting for this question. "Do any of you guys know exactly what an ingénue is?" I asked.

Everyone, including Mr. Segal, drew a blank.

I took out a definition scrawled from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "Ingénue—An artless, innocent, or naive girl, esp. of the type represented on the stage." They all just stared at me. Brian Segal shrugged. No one seemed shocked or insulted like I had been.

"Come on guys!" I cried out. "It's the French word for bimbo!"

One girl commented diplomatically, "Well, I mean, like, we *are* naive."

As the summer weeks passed, our jobs dwindled into non-existence. At the beginning, Fatima had planned activities for us, like touring the Maclean Hunter printing plant, or visiting the Mac Cosmetics factory and getting a free makeover. We spent a couple of days hanging around a fashion shoot and a couple more shopping at the Eaton Centre. I was getting pretty darn tired of talking about the season's colours, but kept in mind I was getting paid for this. As the days wore on, however, Fatima just ran out of things for us to do. She did, after all, have a full-time job other than baby-sitter-in-chief.

Feeling useless, I contacted Kara, the editor of *Ingénue*, to see if she could give me some writing or research to do. I offered to act as an intern, an apprentice, a gopher—anything to get me out of the corporate offices and give my life some meaning again. I craved stress and challenge. Even my old waitressing job was beginning to seem appealing.

But Kara couldn't use me. "I'm trying to get this magazine off the ground," she explained. "I'm just too busy, sorry."

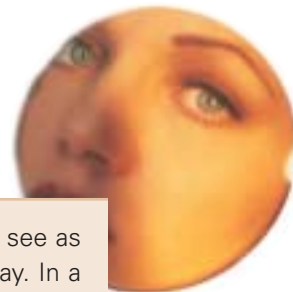
Again, the question popped up: "What the heck are *we* doing here?"

The answer finally struck me in the last week on the job, at a meeting with the publicity people. They were trying to figure out how to market the magazine and, finally, someone wanted our advice. We were scrutinized carefully. I didn't resist as they picked our brains about where we bought our cosmetics, clothes, and junk food; what TV shows and radio stations we tuned in to; and whether we took the bus or drove to school. I felt like a specimen under a microscope labelled "teen consumer."

They had found their target market and they were going to cater to it.

A few months later, I saw a girl in my English class reading the launch issue of *Ingénue*. A Claudia Schiffer look-alike gazed off the cover with a dumbstruck expression. From where I sat, I could still make out the feature headline printed in bold yellow letters: "I LOVE MY HAIR!" I slouched down in my seat. While the teacher discussed the theme of water in James Joyce's *Dubliners*, the girl across the room happily filled out an *Ingénue* quiz entitled "Are You a Snob?"

I gave up, and I cursed myself for being such an ingénue. ■



Activities

1. In this article, Leah Ross exposes what the magazine creators see as the "typical teen." She, however, does not see herself this way. In a paragraph, identify the ways in which Leah is not a "typical teen." Use evidence from the article to support your points.
2. **a)** The opening paragraphs of the article are written in an informal style that includes many colloquial and slang expressions. Is this an effective way to begin the article? Discuss your thoughts in small groups.
b) Make a Dictionary of Teen Language. List the expressions found in the article, as well as any others you can come up with. Then write definitions for each expression.
3. In groups, select a teen magazine to examine. Deconstruct the magazine, analysing the following:

a) story topics	c) products advertised
b) images used	d) level of language used

Compare your analysis with that of other groups. Create a list of the common features of teen magazines, and discuss their appeal. What advice would you have for the publisher of these magazines?

4. In groups, design your own magazine for teens. Consider what segment of the teen market you wish to reach. Create a cover, including the name of the magazine and the stories.

To Christine

S U S A N F O R D E

I wish I could tell you
That you're not too fat
That you're fine the way that you are
That you're pretty enough
And you don't have to wear punishing heels
I wish I could make you believe
That you don't have to starve yourself
Or add to your chest
To fit this year's fashions.
And I wish I could tell you,
To love yourself as much as you love him.
You don't have to make yourself
Into his ideal
The real you is worth so much more.
But I am only one voice,
Against so many
The magazines with diets and makeovers
That you read
The fairy tale your mother read you,
Where the mermaid gave her voice
To be what the prince wanted.
Oh, I wish I could make you listen
But I'm only one voice
Drowned out by so many.



Focus Your Learning

Reading this poem will help you:

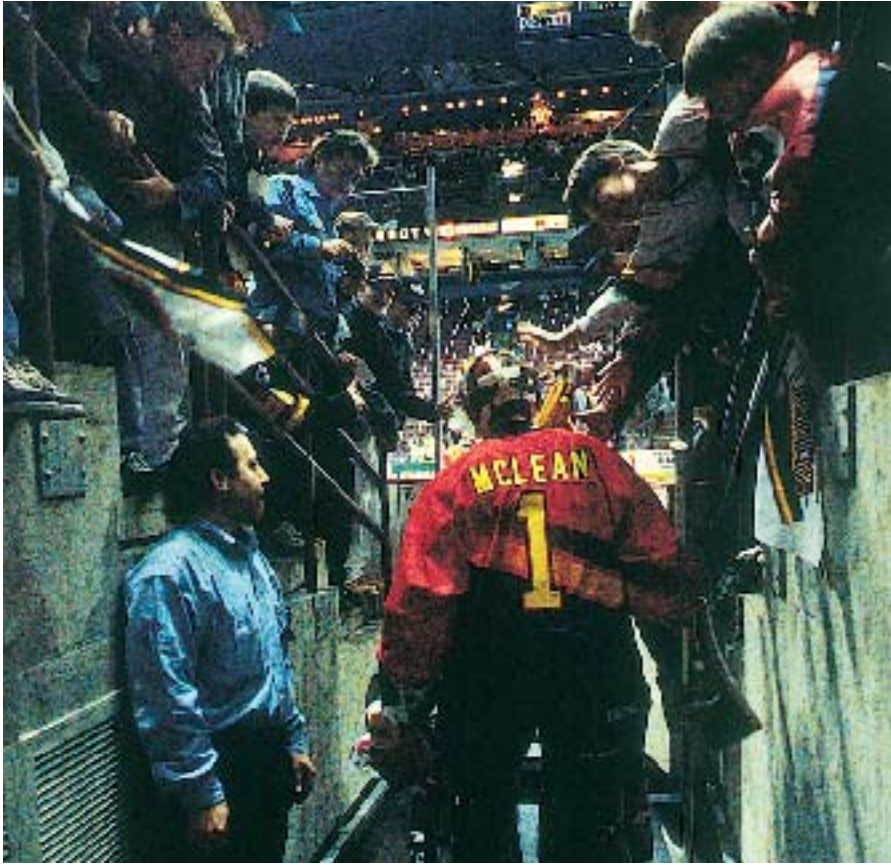
- create a collage to illustrate a theme
- write from a different perspective
- compare different texts with similar themes

Activities

1. Media have a lot to do with reinforcing our self-image. Create a collage of words and images from magazines, advertisements, etc. that may have affected Christine's view of what she should be. Refer to the poem for clues.
2. Write an e-mail message to Susan Forde from Christine's point of view. Consider how she might view herself.
3. There is a reference in the poem to "The Little Mermaid" by Hans Christian Andersen. Read a copy of the fairy tale, and consider why the poet might have made reference to this story in her poem. What do both stories share?

The Game

KEN DRYDEN



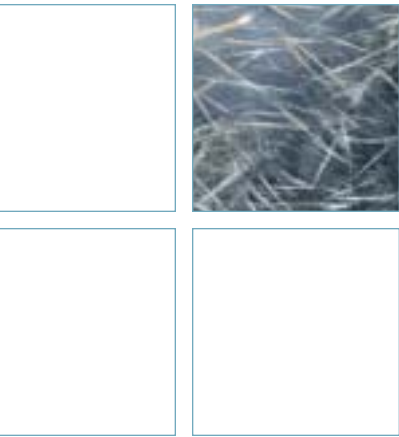
Once I used to wait in line like everyone else. Then one day a bank teller motioned me out of the line, and I haven't been back in one since. I feel no small guilt each time; nonetheless I continue to accept such favours. For the tellers and me, it has become normal and routine. They treat me the way they think people like me expect to be treated. And I accept.

It is the kind of special treatment professional athletes have grown accustomed to, and enjoy. It began with hockey, with teenage names and faces in local papers, with hockey jackets that only the best players on the best teams wore, with parents who competed not so quietly on the side; and it will end with hockey. In between, the longer and better we play the more all-encompassing the treatment becomes. People give, easily and naturally. And we accept. Slippers, sweaters, plant holders, mitts, baby blankets, baby clothes sent in the mail. Paintings, carvings, etchings, sculptures

Focus Your Learning

Reading this article will help you:

- make connections between your own research and the text
- write and present a script
- analyse your own opinions
- conduct an interview



in clay, metal, papier-mâché. Shirts, slacks, coats, suits, ties, underwear; cars, carpets, sofas, chairs, refrigerators, beds, washers, dryers, stoves, TVs, stereos, at cost or no cost at all. After all, a special person deserves a special price. A hundred letters a week, more than 3,000 a year—"You're the best," all but a few of them say. On the street, in restaurants and theatres, we're pointed at, talked about like the weather. "There he is, the famous hockey player," your own kids announce to their friends. In other homes, your picture is on a boy's bedroom wall. Magazines, newspapers, radio, TV; hockey cards, posters, T-shirts, and curios, anywhere, everywhere, name, face, thousands of times.

And we love it. We say we don't, but we do. We hate the nuisance and inconvenience, the bother of untimely, unending autographs, handshakes, and smiles, living out an image of ourselves that isn't quite real, abused if we fail to, feeling encircled and trapped, never able to get away. But we also feel special—head-turning, chin-dropping, forget-your-name special. What others buy Rolls-Royces and votes and hockey teams for, what others take off their clothes for, what others kill for, we have. All we have to do is play.

If exposure is the vehicle of celebrity, attention is what separates one celebrity from another. Guy Lafleur and Yvon Lambert are both celebrities, yet on the same ice, the same screen, Lafleur is noticed, Lambert is not. Lambert, methodical and unspectacular, has nothing readily distinctive about him. His image is passed over, his name unheard. Lafleur is distinctive. The way he skates, the sound of the crowd he carries with him, the goals he scores.

And so, too, others, for other reasons. Mario Tremblay, for his fiery, untamed spirit; Bob Gainey, for his relentless, almost palpable will; Tiger Williams, Eddie Shack, Ron Duguay, each colourful and exciting; and Dave Schultz, once king of the mountain. As sports coverage proliferates beyond games, as it becomes entertainment and moves to prime time, as we look for the story behind the story, off-ice performance becomes important. And so personas are born, and sometimes made, and cameras and microphones are there as it happens. The crazies, the clowns, the "sports intellectuals," the anti-jock rebels (Jim Boulton, Bill "Spaceman" Lee), the playboys (Joe Namath, Derek Sanderson), each a distinctive personality, each a bigger celebrity because of what he does away from the game.

Television has given us a new minimum off-ice standard. The modern player must be articulate (or engagingly inarticulate, especially southern style). It's not enough to score a goal and have it picked apart by the all-seeing eyes of replay cameras. A player must be able to put it in his own eloquent words. How did you do it? How did you feel? Live, on-camera words that cannot be edited for the morning paper.

Celebrity is a full, integrated life, earned on-ice, performed, sustained, strengthened, re-earned off-ice. As Roger Angell once put it, we want our athletes to be “good at life.” Role models for children, people we want to believe earned what they have, every bit as good at things off the ice as on. If they’re inarticulate, harsh, and pejorative, they’re suddenly just jocks. Merely lucky, less likable, less good at life, less celebrated; finally, they even seem less good *on* the ice.

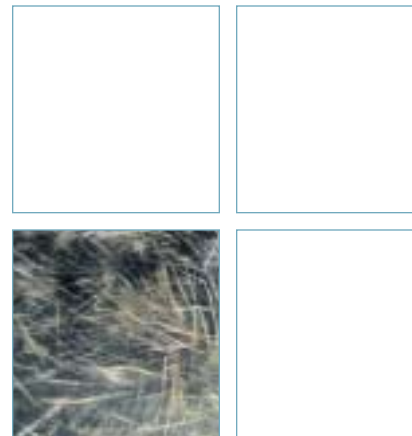
At its extreme, the process creates the category of professional celebrity, people “famous for being famous,” so accomplished at being celebrities that their original source of deity is forgotten. At the least, it encourages all celebrities to learn the *skills* of the public person. How to look good, how to sound modest and intelligent, funny and self-deprecatory, anything you want. It’s a celebrity’s shortcut to the real thing, but it works.

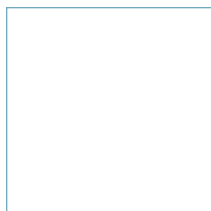
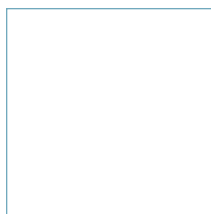
It’s a game—an ad game, an image game, a celebrity game—that no one really loses. Everyone needs someone to talk about—why not about us? Everyone needs heroes and villains. We earn a little money, get some exposure. The commercials are going to be done anyway. Besides, it doesn’t last long. A few years and images change, celebrity cools, it’s over. It all evens out.

But it doesn’t. We all lose, at least a little. We lose because you think I’m better than I am. Brighter than I am, kinder, more compassionate, capable of more things, as good at life as I am at the game. I’m not. Off the ice I struggle as you do, but off the ice you never see me, even when you think you do. I appear good at other things because I’m good at being a goalie; because I’m a celebrity; because there’s always someone around to say I’m good. Because in the cozy glow of success, of good news, you want me to be good. It’s my angle, and so long as I play well the angle won’t change. I appear bright and articulate because I’m an athlete, and many athletes are not bright and articulate. “Like a dog’s walking on his hind legs,” as Dr. Johnson once put it, “it is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”

But you don’t believe that, just as I don’t believe it about celebrities I don’t know. They’re taller, more talented, more compassionate. They glitter into cameras and microphones, give each other awards for talent and compassion, “great human beings” every one. Wet-eyed I applaud, and believe. And all of us lose. You, because you feel less worthy than you are. Me, because once, when I was twenty-three years old and trying to learn about myself, I wanted to believe I was, or soon would be, everything others said I was. Instead, having learned much and grown older, I feel co-conspirator to a fraud.

Professional athletes do exciting, sometimes courageous, sometimes ennobling things, as heroes do, but no more than you do. Blown up on a





TV screen or a page, hyped by distance and imagination, we seem more heroic, but we're not. Our achievement seems grander, but it isn't. Our cause, our commitment, is no different from yours. We are no more than examples, metaphors, because we enter every home; we're models for the young because their world is small and we do what they do.

A few years ago, Joe McGinniss, author of *The Selling of the President, 1968*, wrote a book called *Heroes*. It sketches McGinniss's own tormented trail from being *the youngest*, to *the highly acclaimed*, to *the former*—all before he was thirty. At the same time, he ostensibly searches for the vanished American hero. He talks to George McGovern and Teddy Kennedy, General William Westmoreland, John Glenn, Eugene McCarthy, author William Styron, playwright Arthur Miller—some of them heroes of his, all of them heroes to many.

But it's like chasing a rainbow. He finds that, as he gets closer, his heroes disappear. In homes and bars, on campaign trails, they're distinctly, disappointingly normal. Not wonderfully, triumphantly, down-to-earth normal, but up-close, drinking-too-much, sweating, stinking, unheroically normal. And for heroes, normal isn't enough. We are allowed one image; everything must fit.

The Greeks gave their gods human imperfections. In the modern hero, however, every flaw is a fatal flaw. It has only to be found, and it *will* be. Moving from celebrity to hero is like moving from a city to a small town. In a city, the camera's eye, though always present, is distant. In a small town, there isn't that distance. There's no place to hide.

"Whom the gods would destroy," Wilfrid Sheed wrote in *Transatlantic Blues*, "they first oversell." Superficially created, superficially destroyed—for the hero, for the celebrity, it all evens out. Except a heavy price is paid along the way. We all lose again. You, because, saddened and hurt by heroes who turn out not to be heroes at all, you become cynical and stop believing. Me, because I'm in a box. What is my responsibility? Is it, as I'm often told, to be the hero that children think I am? Or is it to live what is real, to be something else?

Recently, a friend asked me to speak to his college seminar. Near the end of two hours, we began to talk about many of these questions. A girl raised her hand. She said that a year or two earlier, on the Academy Awards, she had seen Charlton Heston receive an award for his "humanitarian" work. Heston had made the point, the girl said, that thousands of volunteers had done far more than he, that they deserved the award.

I asked the class what that story told them about Charlton Heston. That he's even modest, they decided. A few of the students laughed; then, one by one, several others joined in. ■

Activities

1. Read the article closely. Outline all of the qualities of the “sports hero” or celebrity identified by Dryden. Select a sports figure to research, and compare Dryden’s description with your research model. Create a chart to show your findings.
2. The artist Andy Warhol once predicted that in today’s media-rich world, everyone would have fifteen minutes of fame. Create a scenario that has made you famous. Did you win the lottery? Perform a heroic deed? Break a record? Write a script describing your fifteen minutes of fame. With a partner or small group, present your script to the class in the form of a role play, audiotape, or videotape.
3. Write a fan letter to a celebrity, identifying the qualities and characteristics that make him or her admirable to you. Your letter should contain specific examples that demonstrate these qualities.
4. Interview a notable local sports figure (from a school team, a local university team, or local professional team). Ask questions to determine whether these athletes receive privileged treatment, and whether they think they deserve it. Present your interview to the class, and invite questions.

Commercial

JOHN UPDIKE



Focus Your Learning

Reading this description will help you:

- discuss the impact of media images
- describe persuasive techniques used in advertising
- analyse and use techniques for creating satire

It comes on every night, somewhere in the eleven o'clock news. A CHILD runs down a STAIRCASE. A rotund ELDERLY WOMAN stands at the foot, picks up the CHILD, gives him a shake (friendly), and sets him down. There is MUSIC, containing the words "laughing child," "fur-lined rug," etc.

The STAIRCASE looks unexpectedly authentic, oaken and knobby and steep in the style of houses where we have childhoods. We know this STAIRCASE. Some treads creak, and at the top there is a branching many-cornered darkness wherein we are supposed to locate security and sleep.

The wallpaper (baskets of flowers, at a guess, alternating with ivied medallions) would feel warm, if touched.

The CHILD darts off-screen. We have had time to register that it is a BOY, with long hair cut straight across his forehead. The camera stays with the ELDERLY WOMAN, whom by now we identify as the GRANDMOTHER. She gazes after the (supposedly) receding BOY so fondly we can imagine “(*gazes fondly*)” in the commercial’s script.

The second drags; her beaming threatens to become blank. But now, with an electrifying touch of uncertainty, so that we do not know if it was the director’s idea or the actress’s, GRANDMOTHER slowly wags her head, as if to say, *My, oh my, what an incorrigible little rascal, what a lovable little man-child!* Her heart, we feel, so brims with love that her plump body, if a whit less healthy and compact, if a whit less compressed and contained by the demands and accoutrements of GRANDMOTHERLINESS, would burst. GRANDMOTHERLINESS massages her from all sides, like the brushes of a car wash.

And now (there is so much to see!) she relaxes her arms in front of her, the fingers of one hand gently gripping the wrist of the other. This gesture tells us that her ethnic type is Anglo-Saxon. An Italian mama, say, would have folded her arms across her bosom; and, also, wouldn’t the coquetry of Mediterranean women forbid their wearing an apron out of the kitchen, beside what is clearly a front STAIRCASE? So, while still suspended high on currents of anticipation, we deduce that this is not a commercial for spaghetti.

Nor for rejuvenating skin creams or hair rinses, for the camera cuts from GRANDMOTHER to the BOY. He is hopping through a room. Not quite hopping, nor exactly skipping: a curious fey gait that bounces his cap of hair and evokes the tender dialectic of the child–director encounter. This CHILD, who, though a child actor acting the part of a child, is nevertheless also truly a child, has been told to move across the fictional room in a childish way. He has obeyed, moving hobbled by self-consciousness yet with the elastic bounce that Nature has bestowed upon him and that no amount of adult direction can utterly squelch. Only time can squelch it.

We do not know how many “takes” were sifted through to get this second of movement. Though no child in reality (though billions of children have crossed millions of rooms) ever moved across a room in quite this way, an impression of CHILDHOOD pierces us. We get the message: GRANDMOTHER’S HOUSE (and the montage is so swift we cannot itemize the furniture, only concede that it appears fittingly fusty and congested) is cozy, safe—a place to be joyful in. Why? The question hangs.

We are in another room. A kitchen. A shining POT dominates the foreground. The BOY, out of focus, still bobbing in that unnatural, affecting way, enters at the background, comes forward into focus, becomes an alarmingly

large face and a hand that lifts the lid of the pot. STEAM billows. The BOY blows the STEAM away, then stares at us with stagily popped eyes. Meaning? He has burned himself? There is a bad smell? The director, off-screen, has shouted at him? We do not know, and we are made additionally uncomfortable by the possibility that this is a spaghetti commercial after all.

Brief scene: GRANDMOTHER washing BOY'S face. Bathroom fixtures behind. Theme of heat (COZY HOUSE, hot POT) subliminally emerges. Also: supertime?

We do not witness supper. We are back at the STAIRCASE. New actors have arrived: a tall and vigorous YOUNG COUPLE, in stylish overcoats. Who? We scarcely have time to ask. The BOY leaps (flies, indeed; we do not see his feet launch him) upward into the arms of the MAN. These are his PARENTS. We ourselves, watching, welcome them; the depth of our welcome reveals to us a dread within ourselves, of something morbid and claustral in the old HOUSE, with its cunningly underlined snugness and its lonely household of benevolent crone and pampered, stagy brat. These other two radiate the brisk air of outdoors. To judge from their clothes, it is cold outside; this impression is not insignificant; our sense of subliminal coherence swells. We join in the BUSTLE OF WELCOME, rejoicing with the YOUNG COUPLE in their sexual energy and safe return and great good fortune to be American and modern and solvent and fertile and to have such a picture-book GRANDMOTHER to babysit for them whenever they partake of some innocent infrequent SPREE.

But whose mother is GRANDMOTHER, the FATHER'S or the MOTHER'S?

All questions are answered. The actor playing the YOUNG FATHER ignores GRANDMOTHER with the insouciance of blood kinship, while the actress playing the YOUNG MOTHER hugs her, pulls back, reconsiders, then dips forward to bestow upon the beaming plump cheek a kiss GRANDMOTHER does not, evidently, expect. Her beaming wavers momentarily, like a candle flame when a distant door is opened. The DAUGHTER-IN-LAW again pulls back, as if coolly to contemplate the product of her affectionate inspiration. Whether her tense string of hesitations was spun artfully by an actress fulfilling a role or was visited upon the actress as she searched her role for nuances (we can imagine how vague the script might be: *Parents return. Greetings all around. Camera medium tight*), a ticklish closeness of manoeuvre, amid towering outcroppings of good will, has been conveyed. The FAMILY is complete.

And now the underlying marvel is made manifest. The true HERO of these thirty seconds unmasks. The FAMILY fades into a blue cartoon flame, and the MUSIC, no longer buried by visual stimuli, sings with clarion brilliance, "NATURAL GAS is a Beautiful Thing!" ■

Activities

- 1. a)** The commercial John Updike describes is very idealized. What effect do you think media depictions like this have on our expectations of family life? Discuss in groups of three.
 - b)** Think about the members of your own family. How would the commercial be different if your family were in it? Create a storyboard depicting such a commercial.
- 2.** A satire pokes fun at its subject by using irony to reveal its true nature. In small groups, discuss the ways in which John Updike creates satire in “Commercial.” Give examples from the text.
- 3.** Choose a commercial that relies on an emotional appeal, and write your own satirical description. Analyse the images used and their effect on the audience, and try to imagine what the script directions might say at various key points in the commercial. Read your description aloud to an audience of your classmates.

End-of-unit Activities

1. "Examine "Our Appearance," "Imperfectly," "The Toad," and "To Christine" and decide what theme they all share in common. Explain how the theme is evident in each selection. Discuss your findings as a class, and compose a comparison chart to show similarities and differences in the way each piece deals with the theme.
2. Use the shape technique employed in "Crosswords" and apply it to "The Brute." Take all of the angry words from the play and write them in the form of a shape poem, including the ironic twist at the end.
3. Hold a panel discussion on the issues surrounding racism and Canadian society. If possible, some of the panel members should reflect the area's cultural diversity. Members of the audience should compose questions which relate to the experience of growing up in a specific cultural group, or how others respond to issues of difference. Use the short story "Long, Long After School" and the excerpt from "I Live in a Language That's Not Mine" as a starting point for discussion.
4. Write a "catalogue of romance." Use the different types of romantic relationships described in "Someone Who Used to Love Someone," "The Brute," "Golden Girl" and "The Masks of Love" as a starting point, and add any other romantic types you can think of. Provide a technical name for each type, and include an example to illustrate it.
5. Select a visual from any one of the selections in this section, and write a response, explaining why you think it accurately reflects the tone, mood, or theme of the selection. Share your response with other students to compare your analyses.
6. In "The Game," Ken Dryden writes that in the image game, "all of us lose. You, because you feel less worthy than you are. Me, because once, when I was twenty-three years old and trying to learn about myself, I wanted to believe I was, or soon would be, everything others said I was." In a group of three or four, discuss how this quotation can be applied to the themes expressed in "To Christine," and "Commercial." How do media images hurt us? Organize your findings into an oral report. You may want to include in your presentation examples of "perfect" media images from magazines or other media.
7. With a partner, compose three to five advice column letters based on any of the situations described in these selections. For example, you might write a letter from Anna Murphy in "Golden Girl" asking for advice about her infatuation with the student teacher. Put all the letters into a pile, and take turns playing the role of the advice columnist. Pick a letter at random, and read it out loud. Then compose a short one- or two-line oral response to the problem posed. As a class, vote on whether you agree or disagree with the advice given.
8. Imagine that Anna Murphy from "Golden Girl," Wes Holman from "Long, Long After School," and the narrator from "A Taste of Melon" are all residents at the same retirement home. Role-play how they would recount the memories of their past, and how they worked to either fit in or remain apart from the crowd.