

ACTIVITY 1.5

▶ PLAN

Materials: markers for students
Suggested Pacing: 2 50-minute class periods

▶ TEACH

1 This activity scaffolds the central theme of coming of age while also reinforcing students' understanding of voice, inference, flashback, and juxtaposition.

2 Draw or project a line and label the beginning of the line "Childhood," and the end of the line "Old Age." Ask students where coming of age happens. When does the process of coming of age start and end? (Students might not agree on a specific number; the discussion is meant only to inspire them to think about approximate ages.)

3 Pose a discussion question: How old you have to be to write your own coming-of-age story?

4 Explain juxtaposition and provide examples. Then explain flashback as a narrative device, especially when used in coming-of-age stories.

5 Read the Preview and the Setting a Purpose for Reading sections with your students. Help them encounter how a writer's choice of words and phrases creates imagery and voice.

6 FIRST READ: Based on the complexity of the passage and your knowledge of your students, you may choose to conduct the first reading in a variety of ways:

- independent reading
- paired reading
- small group reading
- choral reading
- read aloud

Text Complexity

Overall: Complex

Lexile: 1120L

Qualitative: Moderate Difficulty

Task: Moderate (Analyze)

ACTIVITY 1.5

Defining Experiences

LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Guided Reading, Close Reading, Marking the Text, Note-taking, Visualizing, Word Map

My Notes

Literary Terms

Juxtaposition is the arrangement of two or more things for the purpose of comparison.
A flashback is an interruption or transition to a time before the current events in a narrative.

shantytown: a run-down town in which most of the people are poor

Learning Targets

- Explain how a writer creates effects through the connotations of words and images.
- Use textual details to support interpretive claims.

Preview

In this activity, you will read a short story and note any words or phrases that create imagery and voice.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- Write an exclamation point (!) next to words or phrases that create interesting imagery.
- Highlight words or phrases that create the narrator's voice.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eugenia Collier (b. 1928) grew up and continues to live in Baltimore. Retired now, she taught English at several universities. She has published two collections of short stories, a play, and many scholarly works. Her noteworthy and award-winning story "Marigolds" powerfully captures the moment of the narrator's coming of age.

Short Story

Marigolds

by Eugenia Collier

1 When I think of the home town of my youth, all that I seem to remember is dust—the brown, crumbly dust of late summer—arid, sterile dust that gets into the eyes and makes them water, gets into the throat and between the toes of bare brown feet. I don't know why I should remember only the dust. Surely there must have been lush green lawns and paved streets under leafy shade trees somewhere in town; but memory is an abstract painting—it does not present things as they are, but rather as they *feel*. And so, when I think of that time and that place, I remember only the dry September of the dirt roads and grassless yards of the **shantytown** where I lived. And one other thing I remember, another incongruity of memory—a brilliant splash of sunny yellow against the dust—Miss Lottie's marigolds.

2 Whenever the memory of those marigolds flashes across my mind, a strange nostalgia comes with it and remains long after the picture has faded. I feel again the

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Focus Standards:

RL.9–10.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

RL.9–10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

RL.9–10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

Additional Standards Addressed:

RL.9–10.1; RL.9–10.10; W.9–10.2a; W.9–10.2b; W.9–10.2c; W.9–10.2d; W.9–10.2f; W.9–10.4; W.9–10.5; L.9–10.4a; L.9–10.5b; L.9–10.6

7 As students are reading, monitor their progress. Be sure they are engaged with the text and annotating words or phrases that create interesting imagery or the narrator’s voice. Evaluate whether the selected reading mode is effective.

chaotic emotions of adolescence, illusive as smoke, yet as real as the potted geranium before me now. Joy and rage and wild animal gladness and shame become tangled together in the multicolored skein of fourteen-going-on-fifteen as I recall that devastating moment when I was suddenly more woman than child, years ago in Miss Lottie’s yard. I think of those marigolds at the strangest times; I remember them vividly now as I desperately pass away the time. ...

3 I suppose that futile waiting was the sorrowful background music of our impoverished little community when I was young. The Depression that gripped the nation was no new thing to us, for the black workers of rural Maryland had always been depressed. I don’t know what it was that we were waiting for; certainly not for the prosperity that was “just around the corner,” for those were white folks’ words, which we never believed. Nor did we wait for hard work and thrift to pay off in shining success, as the American Dream promised, for we knew better than that, too.

4 Perhaps we waited for a miracle, amorphous in concept but necessary if one were to have the **grit** to rise before dawn each day and labor in the white man’s vineyard until after dark, or to wander about in the September dust offering some meager share of bread. But God was **chary** with miracles in those days, and so we waited—and waited.

5 We children, of course, were only vaguely aware of the extent of our poverty. Having no radios, few newspapers, and no magazines, we were somewhat unaware of the world outside our community. Nowadays we would be called culturally deprived and people would write books and hold conferences about us. In those days everybody we knew was just as hungry and ill clad as we were. Poverty was the cage in which we all were trapped, and our hatred of it was still the vague, undirected restlessness of the zoo-bred flamingo who knows that nature created him to fly free.

6 As I think of those days I feel most poignantly the tag end of summer, the bright, dry times when we began to have a sense of shortening days and the imminence of the cold.

7 By the time I was fourteen, my brother Joey and I were the only children left at our house, the older ones having left home for early marriage or the lure of the city, and the two babies having been sent to relatives who might care for them better than we. Joey was three years younger than I, and a boy, and therefore vastly inferior. Each morning our mother and father trudged wearily down the dirt road and around the bend, she to her domestic job, he to his daily unsuccessful quest for work. After our few chores around the tumbledown shanty, Joey and I were free to run wild in the sun with other children similarly situated.

8 For the most part, those days are ill-defined in my memory, running together and combining like a fresh watercolor painting left out in the rain. I remember squatting in the road drawing a picture in the dust, a picture which Joey gleefully erased with one sweep of his dirty foot. I remember fishing for minnows in a muddy creek and watching sadly as they eluded my cupped hands, while Joey laughed uproariously. And I remember, that year, a strange restlessness of body and of spirit, a feeling that something old and familiar was ending, and something unknown and therefore terrifying was beginning.

9 One day returns to me with special clarity for some reason, perhaps because it was the beginning of the experience that in some **inexplicable** way marked the end of innocence. I was loafing under the great oak tree in our yard, deep in some reverie which I have now forgotten, except that it involved some secret, secret thoughts of one of the Harris boys across the yard. Joey and a bunch of kids were bored now with the old tire suspended from an oak limb, which had kept them entertained for a while.

My Notes

grit: toughness, determination

chary: ungenerous, wary



WORD CONNECTIONS

Etymology

The name *marigold* comes from Middle English, around the 1300s, and is a conflation, or blend, of the name “Mary” and the word “gold.” Gold refers to the brilliant yellow-gold bloom that is most characteristic of the plant. In some cultures, the marigold’s strong, musty scent is believed to attract the spirits of the dead. The bright yellow-orange blooms are prominently used during the November Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico.

inexplicable: unable to be explained or understood

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SCAFFOLDING THE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

1. **Craft and Structure (RL.9–10.5)** In the first paragraph, what two images does the narrator juxtapose for contrast? What are the connotations of these juxtaposed images? What image is most vivid in the first sentence of paragraph 1? What image is most vivid in the last sentence of paragraph 1? What does each image represent?

2. **Craft and Structure (RL.9–10.4)** What is the meaning of “amorphous” in paragraph 4? Read paragraph 4. What is the theme of the

paragraph? What context clues help you understand what “amorphous” means?

3. **Craft and Structure (RL.9–10.5)** What do you learn about the narrator through the author’s use of flashback? Cite text evidence to support your answer. Read paragraph 1. What evidence does the first sentence provide that explains when in the author’s life the story takes place? What word is repeated numerous times in paragraph 1 that speaks to the narrator’s use of flashback?

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Defining Experiences

idleness: not being active
prospect: possibility or chance of happening

GRAMMAR & USAGE Subjunctive Verbs

Formal diction sometimes requires the use of verbs in the **subjunctive mood**. In English, the only common use of the subjunctive mood is to express a doubt, a wish, a possibility, or a situation contrary to fact. In these cases, the verb *were*, not *was*, is used with a singular subject; for example:

Right: If I were born in the 1800s ...

Wrong: If I was born in the 1800s ...

The narrator of “Marigolds” uses the subjunctive verb *were* in a sentence in paragraph 3. Think about why the author would choose to use the subjunctive.

My Notes

- 10 “Hey, Lizabeth,” Joey yelled. He never talked when he could yell. “Hey, Lizabeth, let’s go somewhere.”
- 11 I came reluctantly from my private world. “Where you want to go? What you want to do?”
- 12 The truth was that we were becoming tired of the formlessness of our summer days. The **idleness** whose **prospect** had seemed so beautiful during the busy days of spring now had degenerated to an almost desperate effort to fill up the empty midday hours.
- 13 “Let’s go see can we find some locusts on the hill,” someone suggested.
- 14 Joey was scornful. “Ain’t no more locusts there. Y’all got ’em all while they was still green.”
- 15 The argument that followed was brief and not really worth the effort. Hunting locust trees wasn’t fun anymore by now.
- 16 “Tell you what,” said Joey finally, his eyes sparkling. “Let’s us go over to Miss Lottie’s.”
- 17 The idea caught on at once, for annoying Miss Lottie was always fun. I was still child enough to scamper along with the group over rickety fences and through bushes that tore our already raggedy clothes, back to where Miss Lottie lived. I think now that we must have made a tragicomic spectacle, five or six kids of different ages, each of us clad in only one garment—the girls in faded dresses that were too long or too short, the boys in patchy pants, their sweaty brown chests gleaming in the hot sun. A little cloud of dust followed our thin legs and bare feet as we tramped over the barren land.



SCAFFOLDING THE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

4. **Craft and Structure (RL.9–10.5)** Notice that in paragraph 9, the narrator uses foreshadowing. What is the effect of this hinting at events to come? Highlight other hints or foreshadowing provided by the narrator. Read paragraph 9.

In the first sentence of paragraph 9, how does the author create a sense of what’s to come? Read paragraph 8. What word choices build suspense and imply that something foreboding will happen?

Word Choice: Diction and Imagery

Writers choose words both for their literal meanings (their dictionary definitions, or **denotations**) and for their implied meanings (their emotional associations, or **connotations**).

Writers create their intended effects through particular connotations—the associations or images readers connect with certain words. Some words provoke strong positive or negative associations. These reactions are central to how we, as readers, draw inferences about the tone, the characters, and the meaning of a text.

8. Consider the following sentence from the chapter of *Speak* that you read in Activity 1.3, “Spotlight”: “I dive into the stream of fourth-period lunch students and swim down the hall to the cafeteria.” What connotations do the images of diving into and swimming through other students have here?

A flow of humanity that is in constant motion and that takes the students with its tide

9. Rewrite the sentence, trying to keep the same denotative meaning but changing the connotations to make them neutral.

I step into the hallway and walk toward the cafeteria.

10. Now consider what is conveyed by Anderson’s diction (particularly the verbs) in this sentence.

“I ditch my tray and bolt for the door.”

Based on the verbs, what inferences might you draw about the speaker’s feelings in this moment?

The speaker is in a panic, hurrying out without paying attention to exactly what she is doing.

11. Now revise Anderson’s sentence to be more neutral.

I put my tray down and move toward the door.

12. Find examples of diction and imagery that convey Elizabeth’s distinctive voice in “Marigolds.” Use the graphic organizer that follows to record your examples.

My Notes

Literary Terms

It is always important to know the **denotation**, or precise meaning, of a word, but often the **connotations**, or associations and emotional overtones attached, help the reader make important inferences about meaning.

14 Review the definitions of denotation and connotation. Have each student complete the Working from the Text activity by completing the practice exercises and comparing their responses in a small group setting.

15 Ask one person from each small group to share a response to student exercises 8–11.

16 Have students work in the same small groups to share examples of diction and imagery before they begin work on the **graphic organizer** on the following page.

17 The graphic organizer gives students a strategy for bringing together their inferences, textual evidence, and interpretive conclusions.

Note that the some of the quotations offered as textual evidence contain examples of parallelism. You might ask students to be especially aware of this device as a form of emphasis.

