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# Literary Reading– Unreliable Narrator

## High School, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

### Spring 2012

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Project READI Curriculum Module  
Technical Report CM #5

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# PROJECT **READi**

**in**quirium



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Project READI operated as a multi-institution collaboration among the Learning Sciences Research Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago; Northern Illinois University; Northwestern University; WestEd’s Strategic Literacy Initiative; and Inquirium, LLC. Project READI developed and researched interventions in collaboration with classroom teachers that were designed to improve reading comprehension through argumentation from multiple sources in literature, history, and the sciences appropriate for adolescent learners. Curriculum materials such as those in this module were developed based on enacted instruction and are intended as case examples of the READI approach to deep and meaningful disciplinary literacy and learning.

## Objective of Module: Understanding Unreliable Narrators\*

### Literal Understanding

- Gateways for relevant background knowledge
- Close reading and annotating

### Interpretive Practices

- CDS: How do you know the narrator is unreliable?
- Gateway for building criteria for detecting unreliable narrators
- Hints from the Text and Character Map support sheets

### Thematic Inferences

- Sentence stems for what text implies about human nature

### Argument

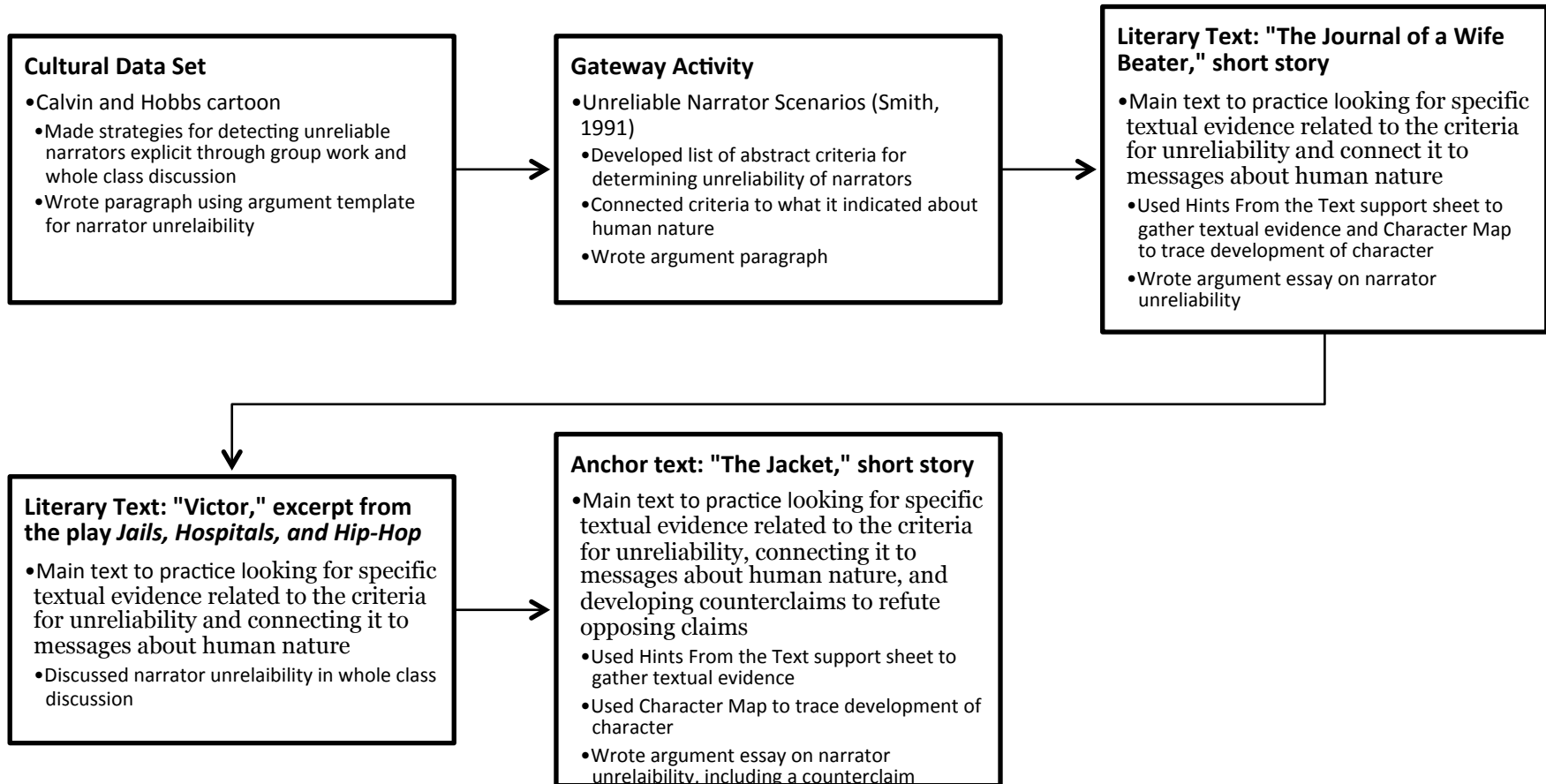
- Sentence stems
- Templates
- Academic language examples

**\*This is the overarching module objective. All designed modules are guided by the six interrelated learning objective below.**

#### Literature Learning Objectives

- 1 Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretations
- 2 Synthesize within and across literary texts to construct generalizations about theme, characterization, structure, and language
- 3 Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs
- 4 Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme
- 5 Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures
- 6 Demonstrate understanding that literary interpretation is based on an open dialogue between texts and readers

## Sequence for 9<sup>th</sup> grade Unreliable Narrator Module



# READI Literature Intervention Iteration 1

## I. Text Sequence

The sequence of texts begins from texts with more obvious unreliable narrators to texts with unreliable narrators that are more difficult to detect.

Calvin and Hobbs cartoon “Do You Like Her?”, Bill Watterson, 1986

“The Journal of a Wife Beater”, Harry Mark Petrakis, 1983

“Victor” an excerpt from the play *Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop*, Danny Hoch, 1997

“The Jacket”, Gary Soto, 1983

## II. Lessons

### DAY 1 -2 (05/01-05/02/12)

#### Overview:

- Introducing the idea of cues for unreliability through cultural data set

#### Objectives:

- Students will understand the idea that real life and texts offer cues for things like unreliability
- Writing basic statements

#### Assessment:

- Students’ list about cues that Calvin may not be honest about his feelings
- Students’ writing of basic argument

#### Guiding Questions:

- How do you know when someone is lying?
- How important is “truth”?

#### Texts/Materials

- Calvin and Hobbes cartoon

- Public list of cues for unreliability
- Unreliable Narrator PowerPoint
- Template body paragraph arguing about cues for unreliability/reliability (in reliable template argument structure document)

**Sequence of activities**

<b>WHAT WE DESIGNED</b>		<b>RATIONALE</b> (Why we designed it this way? Includes text(s), sequence, tasks)	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> (What will students learn? what will they do?)
<b>Teacher Activities</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>		
<p>Connect strategies Ss use in real life to strategies used in texts</p> <p>We're going to be talking about different experiences of "truth" for the next couple of weeks. Obviously, truth is not black and white, but we'll start simple: If we agree that "truth" is important (maybe). Do you think you can you tell when someone is lying? How?</p> <p>We are going to be looking at characters that, for one reason or another, are not reliable in their telling of a story. We're going to be figuring out how authors let us know that's the case, and how reading these kinds of texts can add to our understanding of human nature (or if they can at all).</p>	<p>Awareness of unit</p> <p>Think/Pair/ Share then Whole class discussion</p>	<p>Intended to activate prior knowledge and provide a launching point for exploration of unreliable narrator.</p>	<p>Students may volunteer a limited amount of criteria, including body language, if they are caught lying, and exaggeration but not all of the criteria used by Smith.</p>

<p>Authors often create texts with unreliability – it will be our job to get at the “truths” they are trying to communicate through them.</p> <p>Teacher writes these clues/ strategies in large post-it. Students will go back to these in the next activity</p>	<p>Read Calvin and Hobbes cartoon. Determine whether we believe Calvin.</p> <p>With partner: Is Calvin telling the truth? How do you know he is or is not telling the truth? Create a list of clues they use to detect unreliability.</p> <p>Whole class: sharing out of cues/ clues.</p>	<p>This is a cultural data set, intended for them to reveal the processes they are adept at using in determining when someone is unreliable.</p>	<p>Students will begin to come up with evidence as to why they are claiming that Calvin is lying when he says that he doesn’t like Suzie.</p>
<p>Structuring argument about reliability using Calvin and Hobbes: How would you explain to someone who didn’t understand that this character is not reliable?</p>	<p>TLD – students participate in identifying parts of argument</p>	<p>This will serve mainly as a recap of what students have been doing around argumentation. With this example, it is reasonable to expect students to tease out the claim (Calvin is unreliable) and that all the statements they made about how they know he likes Suzie is their evidence. They should also remember that the third important part of an argument is the reasoning.</p>	<p>Students are reminded of the structure and parts of an argument, with writing that reflects the aforementioned. This activity will also assist students in developing warrants to generalize their thinking about human nature.</p>

<p>WRITING: Teacher Led Discussion (TLD): use Calvin and Hobbes - organize and write basic argument, with thesis, claim, evidence/example, and warrant. (See Calvin and Hobbes Model in PowerPoint as a way to organize argument). Have students use template: body paragraph arguing about cues for unreliability/ reliability Collect pair writing. Have students share their argument</p>	<p>Organize and write out Calvin and Hobbes argument in pairs using template Change decision: I had student write their argument individually. They were able to do this so no need for pair work. I did have students work in pairs to revise their work.</p>	<p>Practice peer editing and feedback. Multiple opportunities for the students to improve their writing.</p>	<p>Through practice in writing, revising, and editing/ feedback, students can demonstrate their understanding or argument structure.</p>
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### **DAY 3 – 6 (05/04/12 and 05/07-05/09/12)**

#### **Overview:**

- Using short monologues (Smith, 1991) to detect unreliable narrators in texts

#### **Objectives:**

- Adding to list of literary cues and tropes for unreliability in texts
- Practice in detecting unreliable narrators in texts
- Writing basic argument

#### **Assessment:**

- Thematic statements
- Thesis and one body paragraph of argument on monologues

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- To what extent is this character reliable? How do you know?
- What might be character’s worldview?
- “If narrator is reliable, what might that suggest about human nature? If narrator isn’t reliable, what might that suggest about the human nature?”

#### **POSSIBLE Texts/Materials**



- Character monologues
- Public list of cues for unreliability-adding to the list
- Thesis template guides
- Collaborative peer review sheet—change decision: did not use. Did not consider it useful

<b>WHAT WE DESIGNED</b>		<b>RATIONALE</b> (Why we designed it this way? Includes text(s), sequence, tasks)	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> (What will students learn? what will they do?)
<b>Teacher Activities</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>		
<p>Continue with idea of unreliability through monologues. The handout included five monologues. First monologue is read aloud and TLD: Is this perspective reliable or unreliable? How do you know? If this view were true, what would it suggest about human nature?</p> <p>Students work on the next six monologues in groups of three, answering the questions provided for each monologue and determining reliability and reasons why they believe narrator is/ is not reliable.</p>	<p>Students discuss and read first monologue as whole class then in groups of three they read the next six, answering questions related to determining reliability and providing reasons why they believe narrator is/ is not reliable.</p>	<p>Students make judgments about people’s feelings and character with limited cues to guide them. This gateway activity should reveal the normative thought processes of evaluating reliability and the reconstruction of meaning once they deem a speaker to be unreliable.</p>	<p>Students will make explicit the cues they pick out when determining unreliability and also practice reconstructing meaning of an unreliable narrator. Students should come away with the feeling that this process is something that occurs daily in their lives.</p>
<p>Whole class discussion of answers to the questions and criteria for detecting unreliability and for reconstructing meanings</p>	<p>Students share answers to the questions and the criteria used for detecting unreliability and for reconstructing meanings when they suspects a character is unreliable. Add to public list of heuristics</p>	<p>Follows Smith’s design</p>	<p>Students will be able to start noticing that there are criteria we can use in texts when detecting unreliability.</p>

<p>Instruct students to pick one monologue where they determined the narrator is unreliable. Write down what the character's worldview might be. Change decision: Students picked out one monologue and wrote an argument about why the narrator was unreliable. That was a first draft. Second draft required that students made specific a clue/ cue they used and also that they add a thesis sentence at the end using the template.</p> <p>Discuss thesis template Instruct students to write out a thesis and one body paragraph of argument on their chosen monologue and their responses to the character questions</p>	<p>Students pick out one monologue, re-read it and write down their ideas about the character and their worldview and about what it may tell us about human nature. Change decision: students write an argument based on one monologue</p> <p>Individual writing, using their ideas about the character worldviews and the thesis template as a guide.</p>	<p>Practice in writing arguments</p> <p>The use of thematic statements is also practice in thinking more globally about author's generalizations.</p>	<p>Students will generate arguments using some of the criteria discussed by Smith. Students will learn how to revise in specific ways: adding a cue to strengthen argument and adding a thematic sentence at the end, again to strengthen argument.</p>
<p>Revise in pairs with collaborative peer review sheet</p>	<p>Peer revision of writing</p>	<p>These provide practice of the skill and an opportunity to negotiate meaning of Smith's criteria.</p>	<p>Students will practice strengthening evidence by naming the clue/ cue and providing specific evidence.</p>

**DAY 7-12 (FIRST SHORT STORY) (05/10-11 and 05/14-17/12)**

**Overview:**

- The lesson will focus on practice of the strategies used with cultural data sets with the first short story of the unit

**Objectives:**

- Students will practice close reading skills
- Students will practice identifying cues for unreliability, and comparing character’s worldview to that of author.
- Why might author present unreliable character? How might this connect to theme?
- Students will practice constructing arguments about literature

**Assessment:**

- Text annotations
- Answers to close reading questions
- Small and whole class discussions
- Argument writing

**Guiding Questions:**

- If narrator is reliable, what might this suggest about human nature?
- If narrator isn’t reliable, what might this suggest about human nature?
- What does this story add to our understanding about human nature?

**Text/Materials:**

- “Journal of a Wife Beater”
- Close reading questions
- Thematic inferences template (in reliable template argument structure document)

<b>WHAT WE DESIGNED</b>		<b>RATIONALE</b> (Why we designed it this way? Includes text(s), sequence, tasks)	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> (What will students learn? what will they do?)
<b>Teacher Activities</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>		
TRANSITION: We’ve been reading shorter pieces and thinking about reliability and unreliability. We’re now going to be looking at some short stories and considering whether we think the narrators	Awareness of purpose	TEXT: This is first text that offers many clues for the narrator to be considered unreliable. This story is the next step up from the Smith	Students will notice the difference between the list of important things they came up with and what the narrator

<p>– storytellers – are reliable</p> <p>Instruct students that we will be starting with the first short story of the unit and will be using the same strategies we have been working on to understand the story and detect unreliability.</p> <p>Gateway Activity: Instruct students to jot down some ideas to the following question: “Based on what you’ve seen and experienced, what is the single most important thing that people in a committed relationship must do?”</p> <p>Students share ideas as a whole class – We’re going to read the fictional journal of a new husband – let’s see what we can determine about this man’s understanding of marriage.</p> <p>Instruct students to read first two journal entries (Oct. 2 and 5) and annotate text. Focus on three basic annotation categories: Questions I have, Predictions, and Connections.</p> <p>Pair/Share: Instruct students to pair with a partner and share out their annotations, focusing on understanding characters and plot and on trying to figure out answers to questions they might have.</p> <p>Instruct students to read next two journal entries silently (Oct. 7 and 11) and annotate.</p>	<p>Gateway activity</p>     <p>Whole class discussion</p>   <p>Students read on their own first. When done, they share their annotations and try to clarify questions or misunderstandings</p> <p>Read and annotate</p> <p>Work in pairs answering questions. Students will use the list of cues/ strategies for detecting unreliability posted in the classroom</p>  <p>Enhancing skills</p>	<p>scenarios, where the narrator’s reliability is clearly questionable. Text complexity, including text length, allows for further discussion of theme or worldview.</p> <p>This gateway activity helps students to notice the extreme differences between their views of what is important in a relationship and what the narrator thinks is important.</p>    <p>Silent reading and sharing of questions, clarifications useful for students to articulate strategies for understanding literal meanings.</p>	<p>portrays as important in his marriage.</p>         <p>Students will get a little more practice in being metacognitive about reading comprehension strategies.</p>
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<p>With same partner: instruct students to answer the following questions by going back through the two entries:  How does the narrator (Vasili) feel about his wife’s reaction to him beating her? How do you know? How would the narrator’s feelings affect the story he chooses to tell us? Do we believe the narrator’s version of what has happened so far? Why or why not?  Teacher will instruct students to refer to the list of cues/ strategies developed the previous week and posted in the classroom.</p> <p>Instruct students to read and annotate the next entry (Oct 15)</p> <p>Brief whole class discussion of what is happening in this entry</p> <p>Instruct students to read and annotate final entry and answer the following questions with partner:  What reason does the narrator give for choosing to no longer beat his wife? Do you believe him? Support your answer with evidence from the text.</p> <p>10 minute writing exercise: students take one of the entries and make it “reliable” by changing wording.</p> <p>Guide students in constructing thematic inference: – ask, how would you introduce a statement about your interpretation of the theme of this text?</p>	<p>Annotate and discuss</p> <p>Whole class discussion</p> <p>Annotate and pair work</p> <p>Enhancing skills</p> <p>Practice writing thematic statements. Pairs of students write down one other way to introduce author’s worldview (sentence stems).</p>	<p>Begin connecting texts with author’s worldview</p>	<p>Students will learn how to use assessments of text’s sympathies to construct themes.</p>
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**DAY 13-14: (SECOND SHORT STORY) (05/18 and 05/21/12)**

**Overview:**

- Point of view, unreliable narrators in literary texts

**Objectives:**

- Literary cues and tropes for unreliability in more complex literary texts
- Distinguishing between author/text and character
- Heuristics for literal understanding
- Continue practice in constructing thematic statements

**Assessment:**

- Discussion
- Student written responses to guiding questions

**Guiding Questions:**

- To what extent is this character reliable? How do you know?
- What might be character’s worldview?
- Why might author present unreliable character? How might this connect to theme?
- “If narrator is reliable, what does this say about human nature? If narrator isn’t reliable, what does this say about human nature?”
- How does this story add to our understanding of the world?

**Texts/Materials**

- Victor
- Audio recording of Victor
- Template handout

**Sequence of activities**

WHAT WE DESIGNED		RATIONALE (Why we designed it this way? Includes text(s), sequence, tasks)	INTENDED OUTCOMES (What will students learn? what will they do?)
Teacher Activities	Student Activities		

<p>Introduce Victor. Before beginning, ask students to jot down one strategy they use for making sense of what they read – what kinds of notes do they take? Students first read story to themselves, annotating for understanding of literal events, writing down questions</p> <p>Groups agree on two-sentence summary.</p> <p>Return to story for second read – this time, students will listen to performed monologue version of this story.</p>	<p>Students will identify strategies they use to make sense of confusing passages when reading.</p> <p>Students will be more independent about moving through a text to identify unreliable/reliable narrator, construct argument, and construct thematic statement.</p>	<p>TEXT: This text is the second text of our unit because it requires more background knowledge of the world including racism, and police/citizen relationships. It also builds on students’ knowledge of how (straight) boys and girls interact – discussed at length with Calvin and Hobbes cartoon and stalker scenario. It creates a narrator who is both sympathetic and unreliable – blinded from “the truth” by hope and optimism – this is a slightly more complex unreliable narrator than we have encountered thus far. It also offers, arguably, the most complex themes we’ve approached so far.</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Students should be ready to work through steps of analysis and argument more or less on their own here.</p>	<p>Students will get a little more practice in being metacognitive about reading comprehension strategies.</p> <p>Students will continue to learn to construct argument and how to provide evidence to support claims about author’s worldview</p>
<p>What is this character’s experience of the world? Why might this character have this view of the world? Why might the author have created this character? What does he do for us? If narrator is reliable, what might that suggest about human nature? If narrator isn’t reliable, what might that suggest about human nature? How does this story add to our understanding of the world?</p>			

## **DAYS 14 - 18 (THIRD SHORT STORY) (05/21-05/25/12)**

### Overview:

- This lesson is designed to have students work independently on determining narrator unreliability and writing an essay

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to individually read and develop a reasoned response to a text by reconstructing meanings where a narrator's reliability is arguable
- Students will independently construct reasoned arguments in support of claims about unreliability and construct own arguments about themes/ worldviews offered by texts

### Assessment:

- Detecting reliability support sheet
- Essay
- Essay editing and rewriting

### Guiding Questions:

- If narrator is reliable, what might this suggest about human nature?
- If narrator isn't reliable, what might this suggest about human nature?
- What does this story add to our understanding of the world?

### Text/Materials:

- "The Jacket"
- Interpreting symbols
- Unreliable heuristic checklist
- Template handout

### Sequence of Activities:



<b>WHAT WE DESIGNED</b>		<b>RATIONALE</b> (Why we designed it this way? Includes text(s), sequence, tasks)	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> (What will students learn? what will they do?)
<b>Teacher Activities</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>		
<p>Moving to independent use of criteria by which to determine the narrator’s reliability, what it tells us about the character, and about human nature.</p> <p>Instruct students to read “The Jacket” silently and annotate as they read, focusing general understanding of the text as well as on the strategies for detecting unreliability. Focus on annotation questions Ss have, noting odd things that happen, and possible symbols</p> <p>Instruct students to fill out character map for narrator and the support sheet for interpreting symbols. This will help them understand the story and get a better sense of the narrator</p> <p>Instruct students to re-read the story, this time using the unreliable heuristic worksheet. This worksheet will help students construct their essay in which they argue whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable.</p> <p>Small group discussion: If narrator is reliable, what does this suggest about human nature? If narrator isn’t reliable, what does this suggest about human nature?</p>	<p>Awareness of purpose</p> <p>Read and annotate story based on close reading strategies.</p> <p>Use character map and symbolism support sheet to understand story line and the narrator</p> <p>Use unreliable heuristic worksheet to gather evidence about narrator’s unreliability</p> <p>Engaging in discussion in preparation for writing</p>	<p>TEXT: This text is read last in the unit because it has a more complex unreliable narrator. Students by now should have enough practice to tackle this piece on their own.</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Students should be ready to work through steps of analysis and argument more or less on their own here.</p>	<p>Students will get a little more practice in being metacognitive about reading comprehension strategies.</p> <p>The character map and symbolism sheet should provide students with practice in attending to multiple aspects of the story that they can use to build their argument.</p>
Provide instructions on the board: Write an essay where you show how much trust we should place in the narrator’s version of	Students apply criteria to story to make determinations about reliability.		Students will continue to learn to construct arguments.

<p>what happened in the story. Use evidence from the story and from your own experience when showing whether we should believe the narrator. Then explain what the narrator's version might be telling us about the character and about human nature.</p> <p>Exercises in revision, based on the weaknesses or problem areas in students' drafts.</p> <p>Practice responding to counter arguments by writing a paragraph using the template for responding to counter arguments</p>	<p>Practice revising work</p> <p>Students will practice writing counterarguments.</p>		<p>Students will understand why warrants are necessary and how counterarguments work</p>
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**MATERIALS**



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BODY PARAGRAPH ARGUING ABOUT CUES FOR UNRELIABILITY/RELIABILITY:

One way we can tell that this character is unreliable/reliable is that \_\_\_\_\_

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For example, in the text we see that \_\_\_\_\_

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Another related detail that reveals the character's unreliability/reliability is \_\_\_\_\_

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Generally speaking, anyone who \_\_\_\_\_

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can be considered unreliable/reliable, because \_\_\_\_\_

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## Whom Do You Trust?

Decide whether you trust the judgment of the narrators of the following little stories by answering the questions below

**1.** Oh, man, these teachers. I mean, they got it in for me. Four different teachers send me to the dean in the same month. It must be a conspiracy. And, I tell you, I don't deserve it. Nope. This is just another classic case of discrimination.

- a. Is this a case of discrimination?
- b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?
- c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

**2.** The buildings—they are so beautiful. We have nothing like them in my country. And the sun, when it shines in the windows, it is golden. Even the—what are they called—sidewalks. They glisten. Perhaps they have diamonds in them. I am so lucky to be here in Milwaukee. It is surely the most beautiful city in all the world.

- a. Is Milwaukee the most beautiful city in all the world?
- b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?
- c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

**3.** Well, today's the day. I have to break up with her. I'm getting kidded all the time by the guys. They say she's not cool enough for me. Just because she dresses a little differently and is do involved in school. And I like her. A lot. But I can't stand the kidding. I'm afraid everyone will start to think I'm not cool enough for them. So I'll just have to tell her I can't see her anymore.

- a. Does the narrator like the girl a lot?
- b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?
- c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

4. My daughter came home and told me that Mr. Carl taught something that was way too hard for students and then refused to explain it to them. That's when she showed me her exam that she failed. She said she wasn't the only one who failed the exam that a bunch of other students did as well. I think Mr. Carl should be fired.

a. Should Mr. Carl be fired?

b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?

c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

5. Sometimes teachers can be so unfair. Take what happened to Jane this afternoon in English. Jane worked so hard on her paper. She finished it last week and asked me to read it. It was, quite frankly, better than mine. Jane had always done solid work, but this was exceptional. When I told her that I thought her work was better than mine, she blushed. She said, "you always get the highest mark in the class, though. And you're the editor of the paper. You're just saying that." I reminded her that this was the only time I had ever said it, even though I had read many of her papers before. This afternoon we got the papers back—two days ahead of schedule. I received my usual A, but I couldn't be happy about it. Jane received her usual B. After class I went up to Mr. Smith and asked whether he would consider rereading Jane's paper. I told him that I had read it and that I thought it was an exceptional work. He started shouting that it wasn't my place to accuse him of being careless. I tried to tell him that I had no such thoughts, that I realized with so many papers to grade, teachers cannot spend too long with any one paper. He shouted that he had taken exceptional care with everyone's paper and that I had no right to question his dedication. I feel so sorry for Jane. She deserved a better mark. She really did.

a. Was Mr. Smith unfair?

b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?

c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

6. I owe it to the shareholders of this company to make as big a profit as possible. And if that involves forcing aging and expensive employees into quitting, well, that's just the way of the world. Can you believe that one of them sued me? And hired a female lawyer to boot! Age discrimination! What a joke. Just like lady lawyers. Of course, my time is much too valuable to waste it in court. Maybe

a bribe. A little cash will certainly make that lady lawyer handle this case, shall we say, a little less aggressively. One thing you can count on: everyone has a price, and for most, that price isn't very high.

- a. Is it certain that the opposing lawyer will handle the case less aggressively?
- b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?
- c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

7. Of course, I'm upset. Anyone would be. She leaves me for no reason. To take up with that slime. I break into a sweat whenever I think about it. And I think about it. Always. I was so good to her. Three, four, five phone calls a day. Flowers twice a week. And all this after only one date. What more could any woman ask? Now I sit in my car outside her door, watching, waiting, hoping to catch even a glimpse of her. But she is with him. I know what she is. It makes me sweat just to think about it.

- a. Was the narrator so good to the woman?
- b. What makes the narrator reliable/unreliable?
- c. What do you think is the truth of the situation? (Remember, if you decided the narrator is unreliable, use your knowledge about human nature to determine what may be the truth of the situation).

## **VICTOR by Danny Hoch**

[A young man on permanent steel crutches saunters up to a young woman in the waiting lobby of the Albert Einstein Hospital College Of Medicine, Bronx, New York.]

Excuse me. Hello. ..Hello? Hi. What's your name? ...Oh, my name's Victor. Nice to meet you. So, what are you doing here? Oh, wait, lemme guess. You're visiting you're grandfather. ...Oh I was close though right? She's sick? Oh, I'm sorry. You're very pretty you know that? I mean that you don't seem like the type that you just be chilling in hospitals. You know, I'm not here all the time. I mean it's not like I be hangin' out here. I just gotta see the doctors for a while like this week and next week cause complications.. well not really complications, but like ..Nah, somebody had shot me like two years ago, it was a complicated, it was a accident. ...Tsa ha, don't worry, you didn't shoot me right?

So, you live around here? You sure? I'm saying though, I seen this really pretty girl in 149th Street and I thought it was you, but that

wasn't you?.. Oh aight, I'm just makin sure. You want me to go talk to the guard, and see if he could get you in quicker? Cause I know him. Cause I have to come here every week, not every week, but sometimes, for like rehabilitation, I mean not rehabilitation like I'm a drug addict or some shit like that. But for like, therapy. I mean not like therapy like I'm crazy or some shit like that. But for physical therapy, you know.

..Nah, I'm not really supposed to talk about it. My mother don't like me to. Not like I do everything my mother tells me, but... Nah..aight. It was two years ago, and I was hanging outside my house, and my friends came by and ask me if I wanna go for a ride, so I got in the car, but I didn't know it was stolen, I mean I had a feeling, but I wasn't sure, I mean you never know, I mean my friend he could have just bought it, but he didn't, but you know, and we drove one block, and the cops stopped us, and they made us get out, and I don't really know what happened. Like, my friend had moved and I guess this one cop thought that my friend had a gun, and he had just ..panicked or something, I don't know, so he had just started shooting at the car, but I can't really talk about it. They said it was a accident. But I don't know. ..Nah, I mean I was reading in the New York Post, and they were talking about like 12 different ways why it could have been a accident, ..No, yeah I was there but, I mean, I got shot, but the more I read about it, the more I think it might have been a accident.

Damn, you got a nice smile. Where are you from? Staten Island? Yeah but I mean you speak Spanish? You're Dominican right? ..But you're Dominican? ..Czechoslovakia? Damn. I'm kinda off, right? Czechoslovakia, that's near Germany right? ..Oh but it's close though right? I know that cause I look at maps a lot. I got maps all over my walls, like in my room. I put them up. I don't know why, I'm just into it. I just like to look at like different places or whatever. ..So, what they eat over there, like cheese? ..Oh, you never been there? Oh, my bad. ..So, you go to school? ..Ah see, I could tell, cause you got that look. I'm not saying you look stupid, like a nerd. I'm saying, you look smart. Like you definitely got plans for your future, like you're on a mission. That's good. What you study? ..Oh yeah? That's good. We need more businesspeople.

Me personally, I would like to go into the Air Force, I mean if they let me, I heard it's still possible. Cause I would like to protect this country from like evil dictators. Like Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro. ..Yeah, cause like people don't realize, that this is the greatest country in the world, you know? ..Yeah, cause like, you never know, in other places, people could just be savages or whatever, or the government will just shoot you cause they don't like you. At least here we got democracy, and everybody's protected. ..Right right. But mostly, I would like to be able to fly like a F-15, or a Stealth bomber, cause then I would get to just fly over all those places in the maps. ..Nah I wouldn't stop nowhere. I would just fly over, you know, look at it ..maybe drop a few bombs or whatever.

So, you watch TV? You like Seinfeld? Oh, that's my favorite show. Yup. Last week, they had this Mexican guy in it. He wasn't Mexican, but he was playing like he was Mexican, but, it was funny. ..Damn, they make you wait a long time out here right, just to visit somebody. You sure you don't want me to ask the guard, and see if he could let you go upstairs? You sure? ..Oh aight. I'm just making sure. ..Right ..So ..Would you like to go out with me sometime? I mean, I ain't Tom Cruise or nothing, but, I'm Puertorican.



You know what they say about Puertoricans right? We're good dancers. For real. You didn't watch in the Discovery Channel Entertainment Report? They discovered us. They did a whole thing that said Puertoricans are the best dancers in the world. I mean, they didn't say it, but that's what they were saying, you know. I bet you like to go dancing right? You like to go to clubs in Manhattan? What music you like? I could dance to anything. House, Hip-Hop, Salsa, Merengue, Classical, whatever.

You don't think I could dance right? I could dance. I been practicing for the past two years. Besides, they said in the Discovery Channel that it doesn't matter, as long as you're Puertorican. You and me could dance right here, to practice. It's nobody looking. ..It's nobody looking though. [She walks away] ..Oh aight, nah that's aight I understand. Yeah. ...Aight, well, tell her I hope she feels better, all right? ..Goodbye. ..It's nice meeting you. It's the fourth floor. ..Push the button. ..You're very pretty.

### "The Jacket"

By Gary Soto

My clothes have failed me. I remember the green coat that I wore in fifth and sixth grades when you either danced like a champ or pressed yourself against a greasy wall, bitter as a penny toward the happy couples.

When I needed a new jacket and my mother asked what kind I wanted, I described something like bikers wear: black leather and silver studs with enough belts to hold down a small town. We were in the kitchen, steam on the windows from her cooking. She listened so long while stirring dinner that I thought she understood for sure the kind I wanted. The next day when I got home from school, I discovered draped on my bedpost a jacket the color of day-old guacamole. I threw my books on the bed and approached the jacket slowly, as if it were a stranger whose hand I had to shake. I touched the vinyl sleeve, the collar, and peeked at the mustard-colored lining.

From the kitchen mother yelled that my jacket was in the closet. I closed the door to her voice and pulled at the rack of clothes in the closet, hoping the jacket on the bedpost wasn't for me but my mean brother. No luck. I gave up. From my bed, I stared at the jacket. I wanted to cry because it was so ugly and so big that I knew I'd have to wear it a long time. I was a small kid, thin as a young tree, and it would be years before I'd have a new one. I stared at the jacket, like an enemy, thinking bad things before I took off my old jacket whose sleeves climbed halfway to my elbow.

I put the big jacket on. I zipped it up and down several times, and rolled the cuffs up so they didn't cover my hands. I put my hands in the pockets and flapped the jacket like a bird's wings. I stood in front of the mirror, full face, then profile, and then looked over my shoulder as if someone had called me. I sat on the bed, stood against the bed, and combed my hair to see what I would look like doing something natural. I looked ugly. I threw it on my brother's bed and looked at it for a long time before I slipped it on and went out to the backyard, smiling a "thank you" to my mom as I passed her in the kitchen. With my hands in my pockets I kicked a ball against the fence, and then climbed it to sit looking into the alley. I hurled orange peels at the mouth of an open garbage can and when the peels were gone I watched the white puffs of my breath thin to nothing.

I jumped down, hands in my pockets, and in the backyard on my knees I teased my dog, Brownie, by swooping my arms while making birdcalls. He jumped at me and missed. He jumped again and again, until a tooth stuck deep, ripping an L-shaped tear on my left sleeve. I pushed Brownie away to study the tear as I would a cut on my arm. There was no blood, only a few loose pieces of fuzz.

Damn dog, I thought, and pushed him away hard when he tried to bite again. I got up from my knees and went to my bedroom to sit with my jacket on my lap, with the lights out.

That was the first afternoon with my new jacket. The next day I wore it to sixth grade and got a D on a math quiz. During the morning recess Frankie T., the playground terrorist, pushed me to the ground and told me to stay there until recess was over. My best friend, Steve Negrete, ate an apple while looking at me, and the girls turned away to whisper on the monkey bars. The teachers were no help: they looked my way and talked about how foolish I looked in my new jacket. I saw their heads bob with laughter, their hands half-covering their mouths.

Even though it was cold, I took off the jacket during lunch and played kickball in a thin shirt, my arms feeling like Braille from goose bumps. But when I returned to class I slipped the jacket on and shivered until I was warm. I sat on my hands, heating them up, while my teeth chattered like a cup of crooked dice. Finally warm, I slid out of the jacket but a few minutes later put it back on when the fire bell rang. We paraded out into the yard where we, the fifth graders, walked past all the other grades to stand against the back fence. Everybody saw me. Although they didn't say out loud, "Man, that's ugly," I heard the buzz-buzz of gossip and even laughter that I knew was meant for me.

And so I went, in my guacamole jacket. So embarrassed, so hurt, I wouldn't even do my homework. I received Cs on quizzes, and forgot the state capitols and the rivers of South America, our friendly neighbor. Even the girls who had been friendly blew away like loose flowers to follow the boys in neat jackets.

I wore that thing for three years until the sleeves grew short and my forearms stuck out like the necks of turtles. All during that time no love came to me- no little dark girl in a Sunday dress she wore on Monday. At lunchtime I stayed with the ugly boys who leaned against the chain link fence and looked around with propellers of grass spinning in our mouths. We saw the girls walk by alone, saw couples, hand in hand, their heads like bookends pressing air together. We saw them and spun our propellers so fast our faces were blurs.

I blame that jacket for those bad years. I blame my mother for her bad taste and her cheap ways. It was a sad time for the heart. With a friend I spent my sixth grade year in a tree in the ally, waiting for something good to happen to me in that jacket that became my ugly brother who tagged along wherever I went. And it was about that time I began to grow. My chest puffed up with muscle and, strangely, a few more ribs. Even my hands, those fleshy hammers, showed bravery through the cuffs, the fingers already hardening for the coming fights. But the L- shaped rip on the left sleeve got bigger, bits of stuffing coughed out from its wound after a hard day at play. I finally scotch-taped it close, but in rain or cold weather the tape peeled off like a scab and more stuffing fell out until that sleeve shriveled into a palsied arm. That winter the elbows began to crack and whole chunks of green began to fall off. I showed the cracks to my mother, who always seemed to be at the stove with steamed up glasses, and she said there were children in Mexico who would love that jacket. I told her that this was America and yelled that Debbie, my sister, didn't have a jacket like mine. I ran outside, ready to cry, and climb the tree by the alley to think bad thought and breath puff white and disappear.

But whole pieces still casually flew off my jacket when I played hard, read quietly, or took vicious spelling test at school.

Checking reliability	Yes/ No	Page number and quote	What does this tell us about human nature?
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When it became so spotted that my brother began to call me “camouflage,” I flung it over the fence into the alley. Later. However, I swiped the jacket off the ground and went inside to drape it across my lap and mope.

I was called to dinner: steam shriveled my mother’s glasses as she said grace; my brother and sister with their heads bowed made ugly faces at their glasses of powered milk. I gagged too, but eagerly ate rips of buttered tortilla that held scooped up beans. Finished, I went outside with my jacket across my arm. It was a cold sky. The faces of clouds were piled up, hurting. I climb the fence, jumping down with a grunt. I started up the alley and soon slipped into my jacket, that green ugly brother who breathed over my shoulder that day and ever since.

<p><b>Self interest</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the narrator too self-interested to be reliable?</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the narrator too emotional to be reliable?</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Immoral</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the narrator lack morality to be reliable?</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Inconsistent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the narrator's actions inconsistent with his or her words to make him or her reliable?</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Lack of Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the narrator lack experience to be reliable?</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Lack of Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the narrator lack knowledge to be reliable?</li> </ul>			

**How to start a thesis statement about a literary text:**

• “This text has sympathy for a world where \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

• “This text has no sympathy for a world where \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

• “This text has a positive worldview. It suggests that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

• “This text has a negative worldview. It suggests that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

• “This text suggests that the world is a place where \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

<i>Checking reliability</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Page number and Evidence from text</i>	<i>Based on the world presented in the story, why might the character be this way?</i>
<p><b>Self interest</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the narrator or character too self-interested to be reliable?</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the narrator or character too emotional to be reliable?</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Immoral</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the narrator or character too immoral to be reliable?</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Inconsistent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there a mismatch between what a character says and what he or she does?</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Lack of Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the narrator or character too naïve or innocent to be reliable?</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Lack of Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the narrator or character too unaware or ignorant to be</li> </ul>				



reliable?				
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**BODY PARAGRAPH ARGUING ABOUT CUES FOR UNRELIABILITY/RELIABILITY:**

One way we can tell that this character is unreliable/reliable is that \_\_\_\_\_

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For example, in the text we see that \_\_\_\_\_

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Another related detail that reveals the character's unreliability/reliability is \_\_\_\_\_

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Generally speaking, anyone who \_\_\_\_\_

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can be considered unreliable/reliable, because \_\_\_\_\_

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**BODY PARAGRAPH ARGUING ABOUT HOW LANGUAGE REVEALS UNRELIABILITY/RELIABILITY:**

One interesting pattern in the use of language of this text is \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ . This pattern helps us to see the character as reliable/unreliable. One example of this pattern is \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ . This detail creates an understanding that

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\_\_\_\_\_ . Another example of this pattern is

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\_\_\_\_\_. Again, we can see from this example that

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. This pattern ultimately helps create the

sense of reliability/unreliability in the character, because

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

**BODY PARAGRAPH ARGUING WHY CHARACTER IS RELIABLE/UNRELIABLE**

Based on the text, we can infer some of the reasons that the character might be reliable/unreliable. One reason that the character might be unreliable is that he/she is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. We can see this from several parts of the

story. First, \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ . This detail helps us understand that the character is the kind of person who

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ .

Second, \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_ . This detail also helps us see that the character is

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, These things might explain why the

character is reliable/unreliable, because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ .

**BODY PARAGRAPH RESPONDING TO COUNTERARGUMENT**

Some might oppose my argument. They might say that this character is in fact unreliable/reliable. They might explain that

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, and point to the part of the story where

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ to support their argument. However, that argument would be flawed,

because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Others might argue against my claims by saying that the character is simply \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ This could be true. However, it seems just as

likely that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ For example, in the

text \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, which suggests that  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Ultimately, the bulk of the evidence seems to support my argument that this character is reliable/unreliable.



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**THEMATIC INFERENCES BASED ON ARGUMENTS ABOUT RELIABILITY**

Understanding why this character is reliable/unreliable helps us see that, according to this text, it is human nature to

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In the end, seeing why this character is reliable/unreliable helps us have sympathy for all those who

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In the end, seeing why this character is reliable/unreliable takes away our sympathy for all those who

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Understanding why this character is who he/she is helps us to understand that the world is a place where

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