

Ms. Frandsen

English 4P

Week #4: Next Term, We'll Mash You

Digital

Hello seniors! I am really enjoying reading your responses to the stories we've studied so far. Please be assured that I am reading all of your work and that all work for weeks 1-4 will be used to benefit your grade for this semester.

This assignment will focus on a short story by British author Penelope Lively (1933—). She was born in Cairo, Egypt, where her father, a bank manager, and her mother left her upbringing to Lucy, her nursemaid and governess. Lively returned to England in 1945 and entered boarding school. She did not enjoy boarding school, but she survived and later graduated from Oxford University. She worked as a research assistant for a sociology professor, then married and raised her two children at home. When her youngest child started school, Lively began writing fiction stories and novels.

Objectives

- Analyze the way irony achieves a specific rhetorical purpose
- Analyze the way in which the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support the claim

Quickwrite

Have you ever been suddenly put in a new social situation, such as enrolling in a new school, going to a camp for the first time, or moving to a different town? Jot down four or five tips that you would give someone to help him or her adjust to such a new situation and avoid problems.

Theme

A **theme** is the central idea or insight in a work of literature. It is different from the subject of a work, which can be expressed in a word or two such as love, revenge, or growing up. The theme of a story is stated in a sentence as a generalization about human behavior or life that the writer is trying to dramatize or convey. Writers rarely state the theme of a story explicitly or tack it on as a moral; instead, they imply the theme by revealing it through the title, the central conflict, a symbol, or their characters' thoughts and actions. Often the key to figuring out a theme is to first understand the characters in a story—what they value and what motivates them.

Story Background

Private schools in England (called public schools there) are often expensive, exclusive, highly conscious of class distinctions, and set up as boarding schools where children live and are subjected to guidance and discipline by older students. Every spring, parents take their children to visit and inspect schools where they may be enrolled in the fall. The word *mash* in the title is a colloquial term meaning “smash” or “beat up.”

Vocabulary

Directions: Study the following vocabulary words and definitions. Then write a response to each direction in the vocabulary exercise.

subdued: quiet; controlled

indulgent: lenient; permissive

geniality: friendliness; cordiality

amiable: friendly; likeable

untainted: untarnished; without a trace of anything offensive

inaccessible: not accessible; impossible to enter or reach

condescension: behavior that is patronizing

haggard: gaunt; worn and exhausted from anxiety

Vocabulary Exercise

1. Write a short conversation in which one person is lively and one is subdued.
2. Explain why geniality is important—or not important—in a teacher.
3. Use untainted in a sentence about a politician.
4. Demonstrate treating someone with condescension.
5. Explain the effects of indulgent parents on children.
6. Suggest an amiable thing you might say to a new student.
7. Describe how some movie stars are more inaccessible than others.
8. Name an activity that might make you appear haggard.

Read the Story

Now read “Next Term, We’ll Mash You.” The story is included in this document or you can use the link below. The website includes audio if you would like to read and listen to the story at the same time. The story begins with Mr. and Mrs. Manders driving their son Charles to St. Edwards, an expensive boarding school in the Sussex countryside. These parents are trying to decide whether to enroll their son in this school. (Remember—this story takes place in England.) Because the author is British, a few words in the story such as “coloured” and “centre” are spelled differently than we spell them in the United States.

<https://ndla.no/en/subjects/subject:39/topic:1:188922/topic:1:188925/resource:1:9554>

Reading Comprehension Questions (responses of 1-2 sentences each)

1. Why are Charles and his parents going to the prep school?
2. Who takes Charles to see some of the students?
3. What do the students plan to do to Charles?
4. At the end of the story, what do Charles’s parents plan to do?

Critical Thinking Questions (responses of at least 2-3 sentences each)

5. How are Mr. and Mrs. Manders **characterized**? What is important to them, and what do you think motivates their actions? Use specific evidence from the story text.
6. What does the condescending treatment of Charles by the headmistress and her husband reveal about their **characters**?
7. How does the brief description of the red brick school and its garden convey a sinister **atmosphere**?
8. How does Lively (the author) reveal Charles’s **character**? In a brief paragraph, sum up his emotional **conflict**—that is, how he probably feels about his parents and the school. Use evidence from the text to support your opinion.
9. What point do you think the writer is trying to make by setting up the **ironic** contrast between the parents’ approval of the school and Charles’s silent dread of it?
10. What do you think is the **theme** of this story—its comment on life? (You might focus on parents and children in your theme statement.)
11. Do you think Charles’s parents love their son? Explain.

Reminders

- Write your name on the work you email to me
- All work is due by May 15th
- Your work should be done in Word, Google Docs, or PDF documents
- You will submit your work by emailing me at dfrandsen@tusd.net and attaching your document to the email. You may email your work to me anytime, day or night.
- If you feel you need to talk to me, email your phone number to me during my office hours and I will call you as soon as possible. I am also happy to communicate with you through emails during my office hours.

Office Hours

<u>Monday</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u>Friday</u>
10-12 a.m.	12-2 p.m.	8-10 a.m.	2-4 p.m.	9-11 a.m.

The story “Next Term, We’ll Mash You” begins on the next page.

Next Term, We'll Mash You

By Penelope Lively

Inside the car it was quiet, the noise of the engine even and subdued, the air just the right temperature, the windows tight-fitting. The boy sat on the back seat, a box of chocolates, unopened, beside him, and a comic, folded. The trim Sussex landscape flowed past the windows: cows, white-fenced fields, highly-priced period houses. The sunlight was glassy, remote as a coloured photograph. The backs of the two heads in front of him swayed with the motion of the car.

His mother half-turned to speak to him. "Nearly there now, darling."

The father glanced downwards at his wife's wrist. "Are we all right for time?"

"Just right, nearly twelve."

"I could do with a drink. Hope they lay something on."

"I'm sure they will. The Wilcoxes say they're awfully nice people. Not really the schoolmaster-type at all, Sally says."

The man said, "He's an Oxford chap."

"Is he? You didn't say."

"Mmn."

"Of course, the fees are that much higher than the Seaford place."

"Fifty quid or so. We'll have to see."

The car turned right, between white gates and high, dark, tight-clipped hedges. The whisper of the road under the tires changed to the crunch of gravel. The child, staring sideways, read black lettering on the white board: "St. Edward's Preparatory School. Please Drive Slowly." He shifted on the seat, and the leather sucked at the bare skin under his knees, stinging.

The mother said, "It's a lovely place. Those must be the playing fields. Look, darling, there are some of the boys." She clicked open her handbag, and the sun caught her mirror and flashed in the child's eyes; the comb went through her hair and he saw the grooves it left, neat as distant ploughing.

"Come on, then, Charles, out you get."

The building was red brick, early nineteenth century, spreading out long arms in which windows glittered blackly. Flowers, trapped in neat beds, were alternate red and white. They went up the steps, the man, the woman, and the child two paces behind.

The woman, the mother, smoothing down a skirt that would be ridged from sitting, thought: I like the way they've got the maid all done up properly. The little white apron and all that. She's foreign, I suppose. Au pair. Very nice. If he comes here, there'll be Speech Days and that kind of thing. Sally Wilcox says it's quite dressy—she got that cream linen coat for coming down here. You can see why it costs a bomb. Great big grounds and only an hour and a half from London.

They went into a room looking out onto a terrace. Beyond, dappled lawns, gently shifting trees, black and white cows grazing behind iron railings. Books, leather chairs, a table with magazines—Country Life, The Field, The Economist. "Please, if you would wait here. The Headmaster won't be long."

Alone, they sat, inspected. "I like the atmosphere, don't you, John?"

"Very pleasant, yes." Four hundred a term, near enough. You can tell it's a cut above the Seaford place, though, or the one at St. Albans. Bob Wilcox says quite a few City people send their boys here. One or two of the merchant bankers, those kind of people. It's the sort of contact that would do no harm at all. You meet someone, get talking at a cricket match or what have you... Not at all a bad thing.

"All right, Charles? You didn't get sick in the car, did you?"

The child had black hair, slicked down smooth to his head. His ears, too large, jutted out, transparent in the light from the window, laced with tiny, delicate veins. His clothes had the shine and crease of newness. He looked at the books, the dark brown pictures, his parents. Said nothing.

"Come here, let me tidy your hair."

The door opened. The child hesitated, stood up, sat, then rose again with his father.

"Mr and Mrs Manders? How very nice to meet you - I'm Margaret Spokes, and will you please forgive my husband who is tied up with some wretch who broke the cricket pavilion window and will be just a few more minutes. We try to be organized but a schoolmaster's day is always just that bit unpredictable. Do please sit down and what will you have to revive you after that beastly drive? You live in Finchley, is that right?"

"Hampstead, really," said the mother. "Sherry would be lovely." She worked over the headmaster's wife from shoes to hair-style. Pricing and assessing. Shoes old but expensive - Russell and Bromley. Good skirt. Blouse could be Marks and Sparks - not sure. Real pearls. Super Victorian ring. She's not gone to any particular trouble - that's just what she'd wear

anyway. You can be confident, with a voice like that, of course. Sally Wilcox says she knows all sorts of people.

The headmaster's wife said, "I don't know how much you know about us? Prospectuses don't tell you a thing, do they? We'll look round everything in a minute, when you've had a chat with my husband. I gather you're friends of the Wilcoxes, by the way. I'm awfully fond of Simon. He's down for Winchester, of course, but I expect you know that."

The mother smiled over her sherry. Oh, I know that all right. Sally Wilcox doesn't let you forget that.

"And this is Charles? My dear, we've been forgetting all about you! In a minute, I'm going to borrow Charles and take him off to meet some of the boys because after all, you're choosing a school for him, aren't you, and not for you, so he ought to know what he might be letting himself in for and it shows we've got nothing to hide."

The parents laughed. The father, sherry warming his guts, thought that this was an amusing woman. Not attractive, of course, a bit homespun, but impressive all the same. Partly the voice, of course; it takes a bloody expensive education to produce a voice like that. And other things, of course, background and all that stuff.

"I think I can hear the thud of the Fourth Form coming in from games, which means my husband is on his way, and then I shall leave you with him while I take Charles off to the common room."

For a moment the three adults centred on the child, looking, judging. The mother said, "He looks so hideously pale, compared to those boys we saw outside."

"My dear, that's London, isn't it? You just have to get them out, to get some colour into them. Ah, here's James. James - Mr and Mrs Manders. You remember, Bob Wilcox was mentioning at Sports Day."

The headmaster reflected his wife's style, like paired cards in Happy Families. His clothes were mature rather than old, his skin well-scrubbed, his shoes clean, his geniality untainted by the least condescension. He was genuinely sorry to have kept them waiting, but in this business one lurches from one minor crisis to the next ... And this is Charles? Hello, there Charles. His large hand rested for a moment on the child's head, quite extinguishing the thin, dark hair. It was as though he had but to clench his fingers to crush the skull, but he took his hand away and moved the parents to the window, to observe the mutilated cricket pavilion, with indulgent laughter.

And the child is borne away by the headmaster's wife. She never touches him or tells him to come, but simply bears him away like some relentless tide, down corridors and through swinging glass doors, towing him like a frail craft, not bothering to look back to see if he is following, confident in the strength of magnetism, or obedience.

And delivers him to a room where boys are scattered among inky tables and rungless chairs, and sprawled on a mangy carpet. There is a scampering and a rising, and a silence falling as she opens the door.

"Now, this is the Lower Third, Charles, who you'd be with if you come to us in September. Boys, this is Charles Manders, and I want you to tell him all about things and answer any questions he wants to ask. You can believe about half of what they say, Charles, and they will tell you the most fearful lies about the food, which is excellent."

The boys laugh and groan; amiable, exaggerated groans. They must like the headmaster's wife: there is licensed repartee. They look at her with bright eyes in open, eager faces. Someone leaps to hold the door for her, and close it behind her. She is gone.

The child stands in the centre of the room, and it draws in around him. The circle of children contracts, faces are only a yard or so from him, strange faces, looking, assessing.

Asking questions. They help themselves to his name, his age, his school. Over their heads he sees beyond the window an inaccessible world of shivering trees and high racing clouds and his voice which has floated like a feather in the dusty schoolroom air dies altogether and he becomes mute, and he stands in the middle of them with shoulders humped, staring down at feet: grubby plimsolls and kicked brown sandals. There is a noise in his ears like rushing water, a torrential din out of which voices boom, blotting each other out so that he cannot always hear the words. Do you? they say, and Have you? and What's your? and the faces, if he looks up, swing into one another in kaleidoscopic patterns and the floor under his feet is unsteady, lifting and falling.

And out of the noises comes one voice that is complete, that he can hear. "Next term we'll mash you," it says. "We always mash new boys."

And a bell goes, somewhere beyond doors and down corridors, and suddenly the children are all gone, clattering away and leaving him there with the heaving floor and the walls that shift and swing. And the headmaster's wife comes back and tows him away, and he is with his parents again, and they are getting into the car, and the high hedges skim past the car windows once more, in the other direction. And the gravel under the tyres changes to black tarmac.

"Well?"

"I liked it, didn't you?" The mother adjusted the car around her, closing windows, shrugging into her seat.

"Very pleasant, really. Nice chap."

"I like him. Not quite so sure about her."

"It's pricey, of course."

"All the same ..."

"Money well spent, though. One way and another."

"Shall we settle it, then?"

"I think so. I'll drop him a line."

The mother pitched her voice a notch higher to speak to the child in the back of the car. "Would you like to go there, Charles? Like Simon Wilcox. Did you see that lovely gym, and the swimming pool? And did the other boys tell you all about it?"

The child does not answer. He looks straight ahead of him, at the road coiling beneath the bonnet of the car. His face is haggard with anticipation.