

**A PROCESS APPROACH TO  
THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE  
IN AN EFL CONTEXT**

**Stefan Colibaba**

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Project Reader \_\_\_\_\_

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper takes a process approach to exploring ways in which the study of literature in the foreign language classroom can be made into a significant experience for both learners and teacher.

A rationale for the integration of cultural, linguistic, and personal growth models in teaching literature is developed with the avowed aim of facilitating learners' engagement with, interpretation of, and response to the literary text. Complementary to that, coherent sets of classroom activities designed around the sample literary texts provide the practical component of the paper. Besides relevant practice in the four skills, these sets of activities offer opportunities for cultural awareness, interpersonal and intercultural learning.

The target group for the "materials development" side of the paper consists of university students who study (American) Literature in EFL contexts. Their specific linguistic and cultural background as well as their needs and interests are systematically addressed in an attempt to boost their motivation and elicit well-informed, highly personal and confident reactions to the literary text.

English  
The Educational Process: Classroom Perspectives  
Material development  
United States Literature

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT	1
CHAPTER TWO: WHY	3
A New Role for ‘Reading’	12
A New Role for ‘Writing’	17
CHAPTER THREE: HOW	21
Learners	21
Teachers	24
Tips for the Practitioner	25
Administration	27
Texts	28
Format	29
Methodology	32
What Else I Learned	33
CONCLUSIONS	35
APPENDIX	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38
<i>A SMALL, GOOD THING</i>	40
Notes on <i>A SMALL, GOOD THING</i>	55
<i>FAT</i>	79
Notes on <i>FAT</i>	82
<i>LITTLE THINGS</i>	102
Notes on <i>LITTLE THINGS</i>	104

<i>THE CALM</i>	.....	116
Notes on <i>THE CALM</i>	.....	119
<i>CHEF'S HOUSE</i>	.....	145
Notes on <i>CHEF'S HOUSE</i>	.....	148

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT

*Communication is a miracle.*

C.Gattegno

The goal of this dissertation is to develop a rationale and illustrations for a process approach to the teaching of literature at tertiary level. In concrete terms, this means a volume which includes a number of American short fiction pieces accompanied by practical suggestions for classroom activities, mainly designed around the four skills, meant to help students engage with and interpret the literary text.

The principal target group and direct beneficiaries of the book are 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students majoring in English at the Faculty of Letters, University of Iasi, Romania. Generally speaking, these students have had six-seven years of English in secondary school before becoming university students, so their command of general English – both spoken and written – is fairly good.

The selection of literary texts is not made on grounds of aesthetic excellence or because they are representative of different schools and periods. The criteria are pedagogic rather than aesthetic or historical, and have to do with whether the works can be used to develop students' skills in re-acting to and inter-acting with literature in the most effective way. As such, though the volume contains none of the 'classics', it does manage, I believe, to pave the way for a meaningful encounter with them at a later stage.

My preference as regards the support for a process-oriented approach to teaching literature goes to American minimalist short fiction. More specifically, I have decided to work with a number of (Raymond Carver's) minimalist stories because I think that, as a deliberately crafted literary asceticism, minimalist stories are distinct in style, restrained in tone, and they describe the dislocations and disappointments of modern life with irony and whimsy. Rejecting what might be called interesting plot, these stories often reverberate with suppressed emotion conveyed through elliptical dialogue, emblematic images, and a carefully restricted point of view. The action is usually minimal, but its dramatic rendering endures through powerful presentation. Says Carver, "It's possible to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow these things with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader's spine." (in Harper American Literature 1987, 2654)

In view of the above and taking into account my specific target group, I consider that minimalist literary text lends itself well to classroom activities seeking to foster students' response to and skills in dealing with literary texts in a foreign language.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WHY**

There are several answers to the question: “Why literature in ELT contexts?” One is that the literary text is ‘authentic’, by which we mean that “it is created to fulfil some purpose in the language community in which it was produced” (Little, Devitt and Singleton 1989, 23), that it embeds the culture of a specific language community and can give learners valuable insight into the foreign culture as well as into the language and form used to express that culture. From that perspective, literature represents the personal voice of a culture.

Secondly, literature offers significant learning potential as it occasions experiments with thought, a dialectic between reality and fantasy. Literary texts employ more metaphorical language than other types of text or, in Ricoeur’s words (1992, 48), “the metaphor is in the literary language as a producer of meaning.” Metaphors can be interpreted differently by different readers, and literary language, more than everyday language, consequently provides the ‘space’ where the learners can experience the multiplicity of meaning. Therefore, literature gives learners ample opportunity to explore the multiplicity of language as well as to engage actively with the text in order to discover

meaning. More than in other types of text, the understanding of parts and the understanding of the whole in a literary text exist in a dialectic interdependence. If the content is interesting, learners are willing to strive hard to understand the meaning of parts, right down to the individual word if necessary. They will also discover that the interpretation of words depends on the text as a whole, on the constant interplay and feedback between the parts and the whole.

Which brings me to the third argument: as the study of literature takes learners into unknown territory, it helps to create a heightened awareness of the way language can be used to explore and express realities other than that which is communally accepted as the most socially convenient. As such, literary texts function as models for the learner's own text production, content-wise, linguistically, and structurally. And, in actual fact, isn't that what teachers want to see happening in the classroom?

However, most of the considerations above apply to ideal contexts which often differ significantly from my direct classroom experience.

In my direct experience, the study of literature in English – a mandatory component of the EFL academic curriculum in Romania – is misrepresented as pretentious and irrelevant, frustrating for teachers and learners alike. The former resent failure by the latter to internalize (read: memorize) and be grateful for pre-digested 'authorized interpretations' couched in otherwise impeccable state-of-the-art critical jargon, while the latter see little reason to 'invest' in a field pronounced dead or exhausted more than fifty years ago. So, it is hardly surprising that there is often so little participation in literature classes, even boredom and resentment. The point about relevance is crucial as literature must engage the interest and ensure the participation of all learners, which only happens if they feel that what they are taught is relevant to their

present concerns and future needs. What this very often means in effect is that literature must be shown to contribute to the learning of something useful, for instance, helping to develop a sharper awareness of the communicative resources of literary discourse.

Again from personal observation, what tends to be taught instead is a set of ready-made judgments for rote learning rather than strategies of understanding which can be successfully transferred to unknown literary texts. In other words, instead of being guided towards techniques of individual interpretation, learners are often fed other people's interpretations so that the study of literature becomes identified with the study of literary criticism and commentary. Consequently, books come to be seen mainly through the spectacles of other books, learners eventually manage to acquire the 'skill' of producing the view of eminent critics, but less and less do we meet the individual response. Learners work more and more with borrowed ideas, seem to have few thoughts of their own, and little enthusiasm. They are unable to dare personal statements, turning instead of thinkers into mimics, collectors of thoughts, which leads to a marked lack of self-confidence. This is compounded by the misconception that young people are not interested any longer in reading literature, and unless they take a certain interest in what is taught, their motivation for learning will be minimal.

On the other hand, there's no denying that literature has always figured prominently in ELT curricula at the academic level in Romania. The goal has been for students to become acquainted first and foremost with the works of famous writers, and that they learn to analyze literature, which – with the emergence of New Criticism – meant discovering the author's intention, the 'embedded meaning' of the text. Reading literature in a static society with little diversification, as was the case of the Romanian society in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when I was a student and then a

practising teacher, might have somehow justified the way literature was taught in universities.

Today we live in a dynamic and diverse society with constant changes in which young people are not always willing to accept what might be called the “teacher’s text”, at least not as the “truth”. The meaning of a literary work, intrinsic as it is to the unique use of language, can only be recognized by the individual because, once it is expressed in different terms so as to be communicated to others, it inevitably changes. This does not mean that what teachers say about a literary work may not reveal a good deal of its meaning but only that the full import of the work can only be recognized by the individual’s direct experience of it. Of course, this recognition by experience does not occur by simple exposure, learners need guidance as to what to look for.

The following story exemplifies a classroom situation that needs to be remedied.

*I live in a small city in New Zealand. At the Teacher Training College here, a few years ago, there was a rather eccentric lecturer named John Moffit. John was known for his strong views about the role of the teacher. One of the other lecturers arrived at work on this particular morning and passed by the main lecture theatre on the way to his class. He happened to glance in, and saw John Moffit giving a most rousing lecture from the front of the room. John was gesturing enthusiastically, and eagerly writing on the board. But when the other lecturer looked around the lecture theatre, it was totally empty. A little concerned about John’s sanity, he decided to raise the matter gently at morning tea later on.*

*“John,” he observed “I saw you teaching over in the lecture theatre this morning.”*

*“Yeeees.” John replied in a thick New Zealand accent, and with a wide smile.*

*“But John, I must say I noticed that there didn’t seem to be any students there.”*

*“Yeeees, that’s roight. No-one turned up this morning.”*

*“And I noticed,” the other man continued, “that you were still teaching.” He waited hoping for some simple explanation.*

*Sure, John replied “Yeeees, that’s roight. Well, they pay me to teach, and that’s what I was doing!”*

*“It was at this moment”, the other lecturer told me, “that I finally understood that teaching and learning are two separate things.”*

Richard Bolstad, NLP trainer

Vis-à-vis the story, my conviction is that the main aim of literature as a subject is the development of the capacity for individual response. It is then vital that the classroom needs to be an exciting place and, for that to happen, the agenda governing teaching practices can never be carved in stone. Agendas have to be flexible while learners have to be seen as individuals and interacted with according to their particular needs. Far from considering teaching a duller, less valuable aspect of the academic profession, I believe that excitement can co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement. The question is how to turn excitement about ideas into an exciting learning process. As a classroom community, our capacity, teachers and learners alike, to generate excitement is directly affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence. Unfortunately, the vast majority of university students have grown accustomed along the years to learning through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the teacher.

To change that, a more productive pedagogy must insist above all that everyone's presence be acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated, it has to be demonstrated in practice by teachers who genuinely value everyone's presence. Also, the traditional notion that only the teacher is responsible for classroom dynamics needs to be discarded. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes, and that these contributions are important resources.

Having said that, I am fully aware that it takes a long time before all teachers get used to and consistently promote this idea. More specifically, I am talking about a two-pronged approach which helps to identify ways to re-think teaching practices as well as constructive strategies to enhance learning. From that perspective, the teacher serves as a

catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning.

In that context, a number of (not necessarily rhetorical) questions arise naturally:

- Is it really productive to be always asking learners for their reactions, and asking them to share these reactions with others?
- Doesn't this stifle the whole mental process which literature can stimulate through the interaction of text and individual?

In traditional literature classes the teacher is still seen as the sole possessor and source of knowledge and as such, there is little or no dialogue going on. Communication mainly consists of a monologue whose purpose is getting learners to note down and later re-produce the 'correct answers'. Similarly, literary texts are often followed in coursebooks by tasks that check understanding the surface content of the text. Closed questions of the type: *Who is the main character? What happens?* only have two possible outcomes: the learners who have read the text and looked up the difficult words get them right; the ones who have not read the text properly will probably get them wrong or will not be able to answer. In fact, the actual aim of such questions is to tell the teacher who has 'done their homework'. Though some learners can produce 'correct' answers by reproducing parts of the text, they are far from producing meaningful discourse. Neither do they get a chance to contribute their personal interpretation and opinion of the literary text. The bottom line is that there is no authentic dialogue, no exchange of information or views on a subject where all parties would normally adjust their attitudes and views.

Communication, however, is not a case of unilateral transmission of meaning from an “encoder” to a “decoder”. Rather, text meaning is uniquely created by what all participants bring to the text and, consequently, how they interact. It is created through the suspense between the utterances of the writer of the text and the potential utterances of the reader, the inherent questions with which each reader encounters the text. This means that, in a classroom, that there are a number of different dialogues taking place even when learners concentrate on the same text. Each reader of a specific piece of literature becomes a participant in a dialogue, and this dialogue differs from one reader to another. It becomes then mandatory for teachers to keep an open mind towards new interpretations and not to impose their interpretation of the literary text. To put it another way, learners must be given fair and consistent opportunities to express in the classroom their own reactions to the text in written or oral language, something which never fails – according to Vygotsky (1991) – to impact favourably learners’ thought and language.

This constructivist process is mediated by tasks, by peers, and by the teacher as well. If the teacher, for instance, asks who the author of a specific literary text is, the answer is known to all present in class. This reflects a situation where learners have become accustomed to asking themselves what answers the teacher might want. If the teacher, on the other hand, asks questions about the learners’ own interpretations and opinions of the text, the resulting answers are likely to present novel information to every participant, the teacher included, and thus contribute to the ensuing ‘classroom text’ (Fish).

So, the real purpose of the tasks should be to make learners relate to the text personally, to interpret meaning, to reflect on it, and to form an opinion. In the process, everybody takes on a participating role, different views give learners an increased

understanding of the text, and the teacher might also see it in a different light. In doing this, participants hypothesize about the text, they find answers to their conscious or unconscious questions, and they pose further questions. Hypothesizing and formulating questions are central to dialogue and communication because reading the text raises questions and discussing it with others in the classroom makes this process explicit. In this way, the text is used as a tool for reflection and thought simultaneously with developing written and oral skills in English.

And since the learners also express personal likes and dislikes, the dialogue is bound to enhance the affective aspect of their language use as well. There will be no indifferent participants, and the atmosphere may well be tense because of emotional investment, because of the baggage of personal experience all participants bring to class.

I believe, therefore, that the teaching of literature is concerned not with the transmission of facts and ready-made interpretations but with the development in the learners of interpretive procedures which can be applied to a range of language uses, both literary and non-literary, which they encounter inside and outside the formal learning situation. For that to happen, however, literature in the classroom must be made into a meaningful experience, one which learners can (re)make themselves, a gain rather than a loss of identity, an experience in which their personal responses are central to their textual transaction.

It so happens that the learners in the target group I have identified for the purposes of this dissertation are in the middle of a process of establishing their own identity. That is why, for them, literature is not only about understanding a text and looking for meanings, it is also relating to that meaning personally. In Ricoeur's words (1992, 54) again, "the idea of interpretation adds to the simple idea of meaning that of a meaning for

someone interpreting himself or herself.” Dialogue is not only dependent on a minimum of two participants, but also on having a topic to talk about, what Ricoeur calls the third participant, the It in the triad ‘I-Thou-It’. Through literary texts within which learners can conduct their search for meanings, the field is extended. Through the foreign literary text in particular, they experience other ways of living in addition to what they have the opportunity to experience within their own culture. Entering into a communication process with the literary text is entering into a dialogic process with the foreign culture, where not only the text and the culture in question are interpreted, but where the individual learner’s self is developed through dialogue and interpretation.

Personal engagement on the learners’ side is vital in this process. According to Foucault (in Falzon 1998, 37), “the idea that the other can simply reveal or disclose itself to us, without any work whatsoever on our part, is ultimately unintelligible. There can be no access to the other without our actively organising the other in terms of our categories.” It follows that learners impose their categories upon the foreign culture in order to understand, simultaneously with being influenced by the foreign culture and having their own understanding changed. Through this dialectic process with the foreign language text, both cultural awareness and language awareness develop.

To sum up, dialogue, both written and oral, about the literary text in the classroom has obvious benefits:

- it provides opportunities for the teacher to gain insight into the learning process which goes on within the individual learner

- learning a foreign language means getting socialized into a new culture through interaction with that culture, and the literary text represents the personal voice of that culture
- listening to and discussing other learners' (and the teacher's) interpretations and understanding of the text help to enhance, through further dialogue, individual learning

### **A New Role for '*Reading*'**

In what specific ways can the reading of literature in English serve the purpose of providing learners with a focus for dialogue and communication? As is well known, speaking and writing have been regarded as productive skills in foreign language learning while reading and listening as receptive. This is based on a hierarchical view where productive skills have traditionally been regarded as more important for assessment. When literature is used in the classroom, the reader is commonly seen as the recipient of a text produced by somebody else, i.e. the writer, and consequently the reader takes on a passive role. In this opinion, it is only when readers do something with the text, like talking or writing about it, that they become producers of language.

Before my second summer at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, and prior to my direct contact with the Zamel & Spack schema-setting presentation and classroom elaboration in particular (Vivian Zamel, Writing presentation; Ruth Spack, Reading presentation, SIT 2000), I had been trained to believe that reading is

a quest for the quintessential truth waiting to be delivered from its textual ‘manacles’. That for me explained why the heralds of Truth erect high walls of twice-mediated interpretations between text and reader, and sell them in small doses, called “guides d’interprétation du texte”, simulacra of the flesh and blood of the real thing. And the surrogate sells well because the reader, i.e. learner, needs and wants to have the ‘correct answers’ for the “big exam”. And very often, the reader is led to this belief by teachers themselves, who thus enact rituals of control and obedience to authority. Sooner or later, however, readers see the monopoly on ‘legitimized readings’ as an attempt to enslave them within another’s system because absolute reverence to others’ ‘readings’ controls, limits, and ultimately blocks authentic personal reactions.

On a general scale, literary theory itself has shifted focus from the relationship between the text and its author to that between the text and its reader. The historical-biographical method of looking for clues to the meaning of a text in the author’s life was replaced by New Criticism which advocates ‘close reading’ in order to unearth the embedded meanings. Still, both the historical-biographical method and New Criticism continue to ignore the reader’s role as a co-producer of meaning.

This changed dramatically with the advent of reception theory and reader response where the reader’s own understanding of the text is what counts. And rightly so as, to my mind, a process where the reader can relate actively to the text is far more interesting in relation to the study of FL literature. This applies as much to the individual’s reading and interpreting processes in a dialogue between text and reader as to the classroom or group discourse that might follow. Since far from everything is expressed within the literary work; readers have to listen to what the text tells them, discover the gaps and try to fill them.

This discovery process is an active and creative part in which different readers will discover different gaps, while the reading experience appears as an encounter between the 'horizon' of the text and the reader's personal 'horizon'. This means that readers bring their complete experience and pre-knowledge into the encounter with the text.

In addition to that, reading is a communicative experience in the sense that it is a matter of being open towards answers to one's own questions. All learners, indeed all human beings, have unconscious or conscious questions and we are constantly looking for answers to our own questions. Literature makes statements, which might turn out to be the answers we are looking for. If we regard reading as a productive language exercise where the reader interacts with the text in producing meaning, the literary text offers a cultural meeting point.

Basically, there are two approaches to a literary text (Ricoeur 1992): one of explaining and one of interpreting, where explanation is associated primarily with science, and interpretation and understanding with the humanities. These two attitudes result in two different approaches to the text in the classroom. The former requires the reader to explain or, often in the classroom situation, have the text explained by the teacher, and this has been the prevalent classroom attitude to literary texts in universities over the last 50 years (occasioning the 'teaching' of various approaches to text interpretation: de-construction, feminist, marxist, archetypal, psychoanalytical, etc.).

The latter attitude requires a different strategy because interpreting the text is realised through the subjects' interpretation of themselves. The reader makes the text his/her own or, in other words, the semantic possibilities inherent in the text are realised by the reader in a temporal situation. Interpreting is seen as communication with the text

and the reader becomes a co-producer of meaning in a process where personal responses, wishes, preconceptions, experiences, and commitments are instrumental to creating a manner of cognitive and emotional interpretation in which absolute laws are not the law.

Since reading is developmental, since more often than not it involves recovery of an incompletely encoded message, especially in a foreign language, readers must learn to operate with insufficient data and negotiate with the text in a dialogic process. It appears then that reading is not only naturally integrated (feeding off and into the other skills along the continuum – consider the crucial role of writing in providing insights into how and why reading works) but also integrative (a means of introducing and practicing all the components of language).

Consequently, providing opportunities for learners to engage and connect with the text through imaginative conceptualizations of ‘alternative worlds’, i.e. literary texts, and negotiation of meaning appear not only as a valid pedagogic proposition but also as a mandatory prerequisite for the activation or creation of schemata needed to complete the textual transaction. The emphasis on process in teaching/learning reading involves acquiring a point of view, negotiation of meaning and it also highlights its dialogic, flexible, evolving, non-linear nature.

Doubts have been voiced vis-à-vis the learners’ ability to “nail the issue” (read: interpret the literary text) once and for all in “good solid academic tradition”. However, learners do manage to reformulate the issue to better understand it, they do work with it and with themselves, and – if allowed or even better, if encouraged – with each other, which results in heightened class participation combined with individual visibility and overall involvement and satisfaction.

Another possible caveat is the apparent difficulty of extending learners' responses to the literary text beyond the initial stage. I think that can be done through an appropriate combination of reader-based engagement with text-based perception of what exactly it is in the literary text that evokes the response. It is in the dialectal tension between unmediated personal experience and public/classroom knowledge that the subtle metamorphosis occurs: direct experience gets objectified as shared knowledge. To that effect, open-ended modes of expressing response in the classroom increase the likelihood of reflecting instead of considering it 'done' once questions are answered.

The question, therefore, is how teacher and tasks can mediate a process of dialogue with the text which enhances the process of reflection and thought through/in the foreign language, a process which is much more than reading for entertainment.

In that respect, activities where the teacher reads aloud while learners annotate the literary text and later use their notes in question format aim at making available the big picture first. They are accompanied by a range of narrowly graded tasks that invite and facilitate discovery by creating alternative points of entry to the text and involving multiple information-getting channels (script, sound track, video etc.) that address a range of learning styles and multiple intelligences and bring each time a little more focus and another step towards textual 'truth'. In Delpit's words (1986, 15-5), "skills within the context of critical and creative thinking."

## A New Role for ‘Writing’

My interest here is in opportunities for learners to write their way into literary texts, explore, appropriate, and better learn their insights. This may be encapsulated in the question: Is writing mainly re-active or mainly pro-active? When one and when the other?

When writing is seen as re-active, this reflects a certain conception of its nature and function and, by extension, a particular world view: writing as a finite, definitive, closural act. Writing records *post factum*, its main function is to preserve “accumulated wisdom.” As writing deals in certainties, its conceptual orientation is towards the past which it validates by freezing it into History. Its domain then is the Known. We often think of our own writing as finished only when someone else has read it, when we have mailed the letter, handed in the report, etc. Until that moment we keep writing and revising.

When it comes to FL curriculum design, materials design, and current classroom practice, this view translates into writing being both the last and the least of the skills to be introduced/developed/practiced. As such, it is often treated in isolation (writing is the dominant ‘homework mode’) or appended to the other skills, which renders it vestigial. Of the preferred tasks: fill-in, tense transformation, close imitation of ‘approved models’, in short Transcription. Observable behavior in terms of K(nowledge) A(wareness) S(kills) A(ttitudes): clichés, no real engagement with the literary text (playing it safe to avoid ‘mistaken interpretations’), shortage of ideas, reduced overall cognitive and affective investment. However bleak, this is unfortunately a picture predicated on reality.

On the other hand, when writing is seen as pro-active, this rests on a radically different premise: writing initiates and generates thought and creates ideas first. In this

view, writing appears as a tentative, fluid, open-ended, hypothesizing act whose speculative nature makes it ideally suited for imaginative exploration and creativity. In this light, writing precedes and anticipates events, it makes them happen rather than reacts to them. Its conceptual axis of orientation points toward the future, its domain is the Unknown.

In foreign language teaching in particular, writing has a communicative-functional aim. Its status is acknowledged through an equal footing and advanced integration with reading, speaking, and listening. It provides an entry point to the other skills and, given its dialectic relationship with reading (Zamel), text-attack strategies. Preferred activities? Those which promote divergence from ‘received’ models: brainstorming, freewriting, drafting, double-entries, creative writing, in short, Composition. Observable KASA behavior: sensitivity to context and audience (writer as well as reader-based writing), competent interaction with language, cognitive and affective anchoring and commitment, a strong sense of ownership and accountability.

A word of caution here: pro-active writing in literature classes can be fun but it is also a lot of work. And for what reward? Why would the teacher abandon the power status of ‘critic’ of the students’ learning for that of ‘writer’ and ‘reader’? In their turn, why would students abandon the well-trodden paths that allow neither revelation nor major disappointment? The answer one learns along the way has to do with the excitement and the suspense of the journey. As all teachers come to realize, it doesn’t work to simply point learners to the “fount of knowledge” in hope that they will get there somehow, nor can we bring the fount all the way to the learners. What teachers must do is honor both learners and themselves by taking the journey together.

To put it in classroom terms, the 'beauty' of the product comes from awareness of and participation in the process, from renewed opportunities for (self) discovery. This is the one offer nobody, teacher or student, can refuse: a journey in search of our inner landscape. It is in this sense that I perceive the "liberating power of writing" in a foreign language. Pro-active writing never fails to occasion *ostranjenje* and, like poetry, it "begins with a lump in the throat", and helps [one] "remember something about myself I didn't know I knew." Pro-active writing gives me, teacher and learner, the rare chance to become a major stock-holder in my own development.

Time for a second word of caution: re-active writing is not intrinsically bad any more than pro-active writing is intrinsically good. Both are potentially beneficial to teacher and student learning provided good choices are made regarding context and purpose. This is evidenced in Zamel's circle diagram where activities pertaining to both types co-exist and complement each other. The key factor is togetherness: re-active and pro-active writing, teacher and student, student and student, as 'makers'. Seen in this light, the intersection of writing and teaching and learning is captured in the sentence: "Look with-in and reach with-out." Again like teaching, pedagogic writing is essentially relational (Palmer), i.e. despite preconceptions that define it as exclusively solitary and personal, writing is also about working in each other's pockets, it inherently evokes and creates community, a 'common language', and empathy. Writing shapes, re-shapes, and confirms individual identity as part of the larger whole, of collective identity. "No man is an island ..."

More specifically, how does process writing 'do it' in the literature class? By the emphasis on dialogism rather than monologism, by generating meaning rather than decoding hidden meaning, by putting in rather than taking out, by constructing rather than

construing, by promoting the centrality of the learner and of learning. Also by fostering contexts in which the censoring superego is surreptitiously pushed into the background for a while to avoid the “curse of the comparing mind” (Claire Stanley, “Teaching the four skills”, SIT 2000). Not forever, that’s neither feasible nor desirable; we bring it out again in the more benign form of ‘editor’.

My version of the teacher’s writing octalogue for literature classes in a foreign language looks like this:

1. help learners find a voice and engage them in using it: use creates need
2. intervene without interfering
3. remember that correction affects only 2<sup>nd</sup>-order writing
4. provide security through meaningful and doable activities
5. create space for and encourage learner initiative
6. respond to clarity, effectiveness, and coherence of content
7. learners’ understanding will be initiated by your response
8. give developmental feedback of the kind that nurtures the learning environment

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HOW**

This section focuses on the processes at work before and while putting this dissertation together, i.e. the various actors involved, the format and the actual use of the materials, as well as the conclusions I have been able to draw up to this point.

#### **Learners**

Having secured the support of the head of department, I identified 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students and set the global aims of my class (one semester of twelve weeks, one session of one hundred minutes per week):

- developing communicative skills in English from upper B2 level to C1 (in keeping with the Common European Framework of Reference)
- fostering a participative attitude and team spirit

- developing research/communication skills using modern technologies (Internet, blog)
- encouraging critical thinking, inter and intra-textual connections
- valuing personal experience as a background for personal response;
- learning from peers
- monitoring self-assessment

The forty-seven students who joined my pilot group were thoroughly briefed on the goals, methodology, and assessment procedures. To better understand the context, I have to mention that most of my students come from a learning environment illustrative of the teacher-centered approach. As such, they are used to collecting things about literature, mainly from literary histories and critical monographs that offer in-depth analyses of canonic texts by prominent critics. They are understandably reticent when faced with opportunities to learn how to work with literature, how to engage with the literary text, how to open out and exercise fully their intellect and affect while responding to the text.

It came as no surprise then that experimenting with pedagogical practices – which is what this paper is mainly about – has not been exactly welcomed by those students who expected me to teach along the lines of the “academic tradition”. In the mid-term assessment questionnaire, two students out of the forty-seven in my pilot group expressed fears that the class seemed to be less disciplined and that they themselves were less focused and committed. They seemed to find the teacher’s input as the only valuable learning experience and played down peer contributions accordingly.

At the same time however, my recurrent attempts to encourage sharing and learning from each other and to promote links between literature, the Internet, the Bible on the one hand, and personal experience on the other, were perceived as innovative. At the end of the semester, 87% of the learners noticed an evolution in their feelings from something close to the “threat of the predictable status quo” towards a perception of disruption of the “known”, then a feeling of pleasant chaos, then an elation of shared feelings and mediated conflicts, then a positive expectancy of the following activity, the following assignment, the following class. Quite many students ended up by becoming good friends due to their shared emotions and pleasure of talking about themselves and their work.

10% of the learners said they felt very excited as early as our first meeting when I had urged them to be as responsible as the teacher vis-à-vis the learning experience and I had described and first practiced how this would happen. Word spread to other students and teachers who approached me with questions, some showing genuine interest, others varying degrees of skepticism.

I was surprised to see that a high percentage of students reacted so well to my approach from the very beginning. I had somehow expected that even students with some practice in “liberatory education” (bell hooks 1994, 146) and a longing for participation and expression might find themselves resisting especially since they also attend other more routine-based classes. Similarly, I was delighted to see that the combination of exercises that included personal experiences, sharing personal narratives and linking that unique knowledge to the academic information impacted favourably the learners’ attitudes, their will to work and practice, their capacity to know and share that knowledge.

As to the grading system, the learners assessed their work and participation in a very realistic way. With few exceptions, my own grades differed only insignificantly from those given by the learners themselves.

## **Teachers**

Those teachers who expressed initial reservations usually hinted at the confusion students would experience when faced with non-conventional resources, the informality of my class – possibly mistaken for lack of seriousness – or the grading system which, they felt, lacked objectivity because it included volatile items such as participation, attitude, and negotiated criteria. Meanwhile, however, some of them have come to think that in the general context of reduced motivation for the study of literature that I described earlier, the approach I propose may offer a viable solution. They have come to accept the fact that my approach goes beyond policy statements (“learners’ interests and needs are key”) and actually tries to translate that progressive view into practical terms in the form of learning materials and coherent sets of classroom activities.

Of the teachers who showed support from the outset, some are faculty staff at “Al.I.Cuza” University in Iasi, Romania, and some highschool teachers with whom I am in contact for the student teachers’ practicum. The two faculty staff teach FLT methodology and they mentioned in their lectures the approach I advocate as a feasible way to stimulate participation and create a positive learning environment. They also encouraged me to distribute a questionnaire (see Appendix) about ways in which secondary school teachers deal with the literary text when trying to foster participation

and critical thinking skills. The questionnaire showed that 12% of the respondents had creative ways of approaching the literary text, including intertextuality and the students' personal experience.

This was also an incentive for me to design my IPP in the format of materials development: I felt both secondary school and university teachers could benefit from a structured set of activities meant to stimulate integrated skills development in English while using the literary text as a starting point.

### **Tips for the Practitioner**

- Create a learning environment and foster a learning process that engages everyone.
- Issues of identity and experience, when voiced freely, work to empower the learner.
- Encourage the free expression of learners' memories. Focusing on experience allows them to claim a unique knowledge base from which they can speak and others can learn.
- Let the expression of emotions accompany remembrance and encourage diverse standpoints which all contribute to a more inclusive and fuller knowledge, to accepting different ways of knowing and valuing the difference.

- Accept confrontation of ideas as part of the expression of the personal point of view. This creates the necessary feeling of democratic participation and the certainty that mediation is fair and voices are heard in a safe, open and democratic setting.
- Approach each text/subject from multiple directions that allow for constructive confrontation and critical interrogation.
- Allow for shifts in relations between learners as a result of pair/group/blog work and encourage appreciation of the voice of the 'other'.
- Accept to share the vulnerable position of the learner by taking risks (changed agendas, unconventional settings), by acknowledging that the experience described by any learner is a learning resource for all readers/listeners, teacher included.
- As part of the dialogic learning environment, teach learners to listen actively and respectfully and to accept silencing techniques from the teacher or from peers whenever freedom of speech leads to lack of structure.
- Negotiate the grading system based on excellence of work, attitude, and participation. The grade should be controlled and assessed by each learner in keeping with their academic growth and effort in class.

## **Administration**

I have received several categories of signals from the administration vis-à-vis my materials and their actual use in class. After explaining in a department meeting the aims of my project, i.e. helping to develop students' communicative skills in English, team spirit and valuing personal experience alongside the "feel" for contemporary American literature, after arguing that the combination of tasks and assignments would foster critical thinking and IT skills for collecting/selecting information, I was simultaneously encouraged and gently cautioned against the perils of "undermining the tradition of serious academic teaching" through such classroom activities as poster sessions, group debates, re-reading and re-writing a literary excerpt through the eyes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's young person.

Later, when the students' favourable reaction counterbalanced the chronic lack of motivation that everybody in the department is concerned about, the "disjunction between teaching and testing" was brought up. I have to say here that the traditional test type in Romanian universities requires from students elaborate analysis of normative literary texts following as mimetically as possible the matrix given by the most sophisticated critical minds of Anglo-Saxon exegesis.

Leaving aside the serious doubts I have regarding the validity of that requirement, I have pointed out repeatedly that what I propose in fact is a logical change in sequencing insofar that it is crucially important for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students to gain confidence and skills in personally relating to a literary text before they learn what 'great minds' think of it. I strongly believe that what my approach provides is the missing link between learner

and text, i.e. letting, or better, training the learners to ‘test the ground’ themselves rather than expecting them to first get to know, memorize and imitate what others have said.

In other words, my primary interest with the target group I have identified is in learning rather than in teaching (in the sense that I described above), in providing the materials and the activities for learners to become comfortable and then interested to a point where they find responding to a text on the basis of their critical thinking skills and affectivity worth their while. In the long run, this will hopefully be reflected in a discourse which is more articulate, better structured, and suitably personalized.

## **Texts**

As mentioned previously, the choice of the five Carver stories was made on grounds of topic and time frame suitability. To my mind, the stories offer personal opportunities for disclosure due to the generous life palette they display: love and death, initiation into adulthood, generation gap, crosscultural problems, divorce, alcoholism and other compulsive behaviors. These particular stories were also chosen for reasons pertaining to language and text quality, genre, intertextuality, and cultural recognition.

Although it can be fairly difficult to predict what a group of learners will find difficult in a text in a foreign language, my experience with university students shows that difficulty in working with literary texts is not necessarily caused by unknown words or text length. My own teaching and the SIT experience have both encouraged me to think that if learners “invest” in the topic of the story and find the tasks challenging, they can cope with surprisingly difficult texts as regards vocabulary, structure and length.

The next step was to identify the principles at work when I myself read the texts and tried to think of exercises and tasks that could turn these principles from abstractions into operational assignments. The main concepts I took into account as a reader were intertextuality and intratextuality, self revelation, and narrative schemata. The interplay of intertextuality and intratextuality has been widely exploited to illustrate the possible errands of the mind found in the direct process of comprehending and reacting, affectively and intellectually, to a literary text by contrasting/comparing it to other texts from the media, Internet, fiction, or to peer writing. In my case, the intercultural encounter was made possible through the embedded parallel texts that aim to open up new perspectives on crosscultural issues. In this particular respect, the Internet proved a valuable research tool, also used to select additional “clarification” texts (see for instance the exercises related to road rage, hunting in the U.S., harassing phone calls, AA).

As a result of communicating with my advisor and with my IPP reader, I became more aware of the need for multiple interpretations, progressive decoding, and open-ended points of view. Key to my students’ motivation was that the texts should evoke personal emotional responses, that different ideas, ages, perspectives should meet and be amalgamated by the learner within a familiar context.

### **Format**

The format of exercises and assignments went through several drafts before and while working with the students, and later, when this paper was in development. The overall basic format consists of:

- discussing (oral/written) a personal experience connected to the topic of the story to be read
- close reading of the main text and responding (oral/written) in individual/pair/group format; support is made available (peers, dictionary, Internet, teacher)
- reports
- planning further topic-related work (scripts, films, articles, role plays, thematic research)

This kind of tasks helps students move further and further away from the proximal zone of knowledge and develop personal meanings through dialogue and response, structure their thoughts through written communication, practice new vocabulary and structures because they need them, and express differences of opinion, personal interpretations, problematic aspects of the narrative. In the process they develop a new “classroom text” shared by all.

The following is a list of the activities and tasks used in this paper enriched with ideas from the answers to the questionnaire given by secondary school teachers (see Appendix).

- The Why game (learners think of questions beginning with ‘why?’ in reference to the text and put them down on a piece of paper; teacher collects,

shuffles and redistributes slips of paper; learners then work in groups of three-four to discuss the questions and answer them).

- Learners make a diagram of the setting of the text.
- Content quiz (learners read out individually a paragraph/chapter of the story; the others try to guess which character is speaking, which episode it refers to).
- Learners write notes about the characters, trying to include everything they know about or how they interpret a character (this can be done after reading a paragraph/chapter).
- Learners write an imaginary letter from one character to another.
- Learners write an extract from the diary of one of the characters.
- Learners summarize each page of the text in one-two sentences.
- Learners translate the text into the mother tongue (this raises cultural awareness and fosters intercultural learning).
- Learners try to imagine the appearance of the characters (some make illustrations, cut out faces from magazines, others try to guess the character).
- Prioritizing (teacher writes statements about a character on a 3 x 5 card; statements can range from significant to banal; learners in groups rank them in order of importance, then compare their ranking to that of another group and try to justify their choice).
- Learners act out scenes from the text (adapting a dialogue or inventing an imaginary scene).
- Improvised role plays (learners choose an episode and take on the roles of the characters; because not scripted, this is less predictable and more personal).

- Learners write an extra paragraph, predicting the ending, trying to imitate the style of the original.

The suggestions regarding the nature and format of exercises and tasks came mainly from the articles of Vivian Zamel (“Writing One’s Way into Reading”, 1992) and Ruth Spack (“Student Meets Text, Text Meets Student: Finding a Way into Academic Discourse”, 1993). My own contribution is in the concrete application of their underlying principles, their sequencing, and matching the exercises to the learning goals. As soon as I started working with the students on the stories, many new ideas came from them, my most important project partners.

A final word about the time frame: although the initial plan was to cover nine-ten Carver stories, in reality I had to settle for five, each one enriched with parallel texts. This shows that in an approach that encourages personal expression, students need to feel less time bound in order to feel encouraged to contribute and share.

## **Methodology**

Here are some of the main methodological mechanisms I identified during my time with the pilot group:

- group size should be limited to enhance active participation

- cater for different learning styles and make available opportunities for group work, pair work and individual work
- allow/encourage learners to help each other
- learners need to understand the context
- create a relaxed atmosphere in which learners feel free to express feelings
- give clear and simple instructions
- a large amount of preparatory work by the teacher is necessary to meet the needs of learners
- learner-centered methods encourage using the language in a meaningful way
- mistakes are acceptable in the learning process
- access to the Internet

### **What Else I Learned**

Working on the materials with the pilot group evidenced the interdependence of a range of factors: just as first language development occurs in a context of real collaboration with (more knowledgeable) others, the study of literature in a foreign language thrives in collaborative environments which promote the use of the foreign language in meaningful settings.

Yet the extent to which each individual learner is successful does not depend solely on the collaborative and meaningful environment but also on the extent to which individual learners bring in additional factors which go beyond linguistic knowledge,

skills and understanding. The learners' motivation and attitudes, and their personality contribute substantially and interact with the learning styles and classroom organization that teachers create as they strive to offer material which is stimulating, motivating and conducive to learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

Interacting with literature gives learners a chance to communicate with the foreign culture through the foreign language with its multiplicity of meaning. The literary text provides an authentic communication partner in a dialogue where each learner can learn from ‘the other’ while having to reflect on their own part in the communication process. Tasks which promote interaction enhance learners’ awareness of their own culture as well as of the foreign culture as represented in the text. As an artifact of the foreign culture which invites learners to reflect on their own culture and identity, the literary text helps them to see themselves from the outsider’s point of view. By focusing on learners’ interpretations and problems in the intercultural encounter with the foreign language text, peers and teacher can mediate a dynamic process of developing language awareness and cultural awareness.

In that respect, below are a number of tips for the teacher who wants to foster learner initiative and implicitly encourage independent learning, ownership of class activities, engagement, and a sense of personal empowerment:

- don't feed answers: encourage learner-learner interaction;
- don't do 'listen/repeat' activities; instead, have learners explain because that helps to develop inner criteria and awareness;
- don't follow your own agenda: listen to/learn from learners;
- do feedback which allows learners to see their important role in class;
- set up activities for learners to develop their own class material: give choices, make room for creative interpretation and more self-expression; prepare fewer details, learners can do the research.

By so doing we might eventually come to see Caleb Gattegno's old adagio in a new light: *Communication is a miracle.*

## APPENDIX

1. What type of secondary school do you teach at?
2. How many hours of English do you teach in a class/in a week?
3. What textbooks do you work with? (please list)
4. Do you work with complementary materials? If yes, what materials?
5. Do you work with literary texts in your classes?
6. Do you work with extracts or complete works?
7. Do you work with the original text or with adapted texts?
8. What genres do you work with?
9. How often do you work with literary texts in a school year? And why?
10. What do you think of the integration of literary texts in FL teaching?
11. Are you satisfied with the frequency of work with literary texts in your classes? (if not, clarify)
12. What holds you back from working with literary texts more often?
13. What would help the optimal use of literary texts in your FL teaching?
14. What is your experience of working with literary texts?
15. What are the positive results of the integration of literary texts in your teaching?
16. List some activities related to literary texts you have introduced in your classes.

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## A SMALL, GOOD THING

**Saturday afternoon** she drove to the bakery in the shopping center. After looking through a loose-leaf binder with photographs of cakes taped onto the pages, she ordered chocolate, the child's favorite. The cake she chose was decorated with a spaceship and launching pad under a sprinkling of white stars, and a planet made of red frosting at the other end. His name, SCOTTY, would be in green letters beneath the planet. The baker, who was an older man with a thick neck listened without saying anything when she told him the child would be eight years old next Monday. The baker wore a white apron that looked like a smock. Straps cut under his arms, went around in back and then to the front again, where they were secured under his heavy waist. He wiped his hands on his apron as he listened to her. He kept his eyes down on the photographs and let her talk. He let her take her time. He'd just come to work and he'd be there all night, baking, and he was in no real hurry.

She gave the baker her name, Ann Weiss, and her telephone number. The cake would be ready on Monday morning, just out of the oven, in plenty of time for the child's party that afternoon. The baker was not jolly. There were no pleasantries between them, just the minimum exchange of words, the necessary information. He made her feel uncomfortable, and she didn't like that. While he was bent over the counter with the pencil in his hand, she studied his coarse features and wondered if he'd ever done anything else with his life besides be a baker. She was a mother and thirty-three years old, and it seemed to her that everyone, especially someone the baker's age – a man old enough to be her father – must have children who'd gone through this special time of cakes and birthday parties. There must be that between them, she thought. But he was abrupt with her – not rude, just abrupt. She gave up trying to make friends with him. She looked into the back of the bakery and could see a long, heavy wooden table with aluminum pie pans stacked at one end; and beside the table a metal container filled with empty racks. There was an enormous oven. A radio was playing country-western music. The baker finished printing the information on the special order card and closed up the binder. He looked at her and said, "Monday morning." She thanked him and drove home. On Monday morning, the birthday boy was walking to school with another boy. They were passing a bag of potato chips back and forth and the birthday boy was trying to find out what his friend intended to give him for his birthday that afternoon. Without looking, the birthday boy stepped off the curb at an intersection and was immediately knocked down by a car. He fell on his side with his head in the gutter and his legs out in the road. His eyes were closed, but his legs moved back and forth as if he were trying to climb over something. His friend dropped the potato chips and started to cry. The car had gone a hundred feet or so and stopped in the middle of the road. The man in the driver's seat looked back over his shoulder. He waited until the boy got unsteadily to his feet. The boy wobbled a little. He looked dazed, but okay. The driver put the car into gear and drove away.

The birthday boy didn't cry, but he didn't have anything to say about anything either. He wouldn't answer when his friend asked him what it felt like to be hit by a car. He walked home, and his friend went on the school. But after the birthday boy was inside his house and was telling his mother about it – she sitting beside him on the sofa, holding his hands in her lap, saying, "Scotty, honey, are you sure you feel all right, baby?" thinking she

would call the doctor anyway – he suddenly lay back on the sofa, closed his eyes, and went limp. When she couldn't wake him up she hurried to the telephone and called her husband at work. Howard told her to remain calm, remain calm, and then he called an ambulance for the child and left for the hospital himself.

Of course, the birthday party was canceled. The child was in the hospital with a mild concussion and suffering from shock. There'd been vomiting, and his lungs had taken in fluid which needed pumping out that afternoon. Now he simply seemed to be in a very deep sleep – but no coma, Dr. Francis had emphasized, no coma, when he saw the alarm in the parents' eyes. At eleven o'clock that night when the boy seemed to be resting comfortably enough after the X-rays and the lab work, and it was just a matter of his waking up and coming around, Howard left the hospital. He and Ann had been at the hospital with the child since that afternoon, and he was going home for a short while to bathe and change clothes. "I'll be back in an hour," he said. She nodded. "It's fine," she said. "I'll be right here". He kissed her on the forehead, and they touched hands. She sat in the chair beside the bed and looked at the child. She was waiting for him to wake up and be all right. Then she could begin to relax.

Howard drove home from the hospital. He took the wet, dark streets very fast, then caught himself and slowed down. Until now, his life had gone smoothly and to his satisfaction – college, marriage, another year of college for the advanced degree in business, a junior partnership in an investment firm. Fatherhood. He was happy and, so far, lucky – he knew that. His parents were still living, his brothers and his sister were established, his friends from college had gone out to take their places in the world. So far, he had kept away from any real harm, from those forces he knew existed and that could cripple or bring down a man if the luck went bad, if things suddenly turned. He pulled into the driveway and parked. His left leg began to tremble. He sat in the car for a minute and tried to deal with the present situation in a rational manner. Scotty had been hit by a car and was in the hospital, but he was going to be all right. Howard closed his eyes and ran his hand over his face. He got out of the car and went up to the front door. The dog was barking inside the house. The telephone rang and rang while he unlocked the door and fumbled for the light switch. He shouldn't have left the hospital, he shouldn't have. "Goddamn it!" he said. He picked up the receiver and said, "I just walked in the door!"

"There's a cake here that wasn't picked up," the voice on the other end of the line said. "What are you saying?" Howard asked.

"A cake," the voice said. "A sixteen-dollar cake."

Howard held the receiver against his ear, trying to understand. "I don't know anything about a cake," he said. "Jesus, what are you talking about?"

"Don't hand me that," the voice said.

Howard hung up the telephone. He went into the kitchen and poured himself some whiskey. He called the hospital. But the child's condition remained the same; he was still sleeping and nothing had changed there. While water poured into the tub, Howard lathered his face and shaved. He'd just stretched out in the tub and closed his eyes when the telephone rang again. He hauled himself out, grabbed a towel, and hurried through the house, saying, "Stupid, stupid," for having left the hospital. But when he picked up the receiver and shouted, "Hello!" there was no sound at the other end of the line. Then the caller hung up.

**He arrived** back at hospital a little after midnight. Ann still sat in the chair beside the bed. She looked up at Howard, and she looked back at the child. The child's eyes stayed closed, the head still wrapped in bandages. His breathing was quiet and regular. From an apparatus over the bed hung a bottle of glucose with a tube running from the bottle to the boy's arm.

"How is he?" Howard said. "What's all this?" waving at the glucose and the tube.

"Dr. Francis's orders," she said. "He needs nourishment. He needs to keep up his strength. Why doesn't he wake up, Howard? I don't understand, if he's all right."

Howard put his hand against the back of her head. He ran his fingers through her hair.

"He's going to be all right. He'll wake up in a little while. Dr. Francis knows what's what."

After a time, he said, "Maybe you should go home and get some rest. I'll stay here. Just don't put up with this creep who keeps calling. Hang up right away."

"Who's calling?" she asked.

"I don't know who, just somebody with nothing better to do than call up people. You go on now."

She shook her head. "No," she said, "I'm fine."

"Really," he said. "Go home for a while, and then back and spell me in the morning. It'll be all right. What did Dr. Francis say? He said Scotty's going to be all right. We don't have to worry. He's just sleeping now, that's all."

A nurse pushed the door open. She nodded at them as she went to the bedside. She took the left arm out from under the covers and put her fingers on the wrist, found the pulse, then consulted her watch. In a little while, she put the arm back under the covers and moved to the foot of the bed, where she wrote something on a clipboard attached to the bed.

"How is he?" Ann said. Howard's hand was a weight on her shoulder. She was aware of the pressure from his fingers.

"He's stable," the nurse said. Then she said, "Doctor will be in again shortly. Doctor's back in the hospital. He's making rounds right now."

"I was saying maybe she'd want to go home and get a little rest, Howard said. "After the doctor comes," he said.

"She could do that," the nurse said. "I think you should both feel free to do that, if you wish." The nurse was a big Scandinavian woman with blond hair. There was the trace of an accent in her speech.

"We'll see what the doctor says," Ann said. "I want to talk to the doctor. I don't think he should keep sleeping like this. I don't think that's a good sign." She brought her hand up to her eyes and let her head come forward a little. Howard's grip tightened on her shoulder, and then his hand moved up to her neck, where his fingers began to knead the muscles there.

"Dr. Francis will be here in a few minutes," the nurse said. Then she left the room.

Howard gazed at his son for a time, the small chest quietly rising and falling under the covers. For the first time since the terrible minutes after Ann's telephone call to him at this office, he felt a genuine fear starting in his limbs. He began shaking his head. Scotty was fine, but instead of sleeping at home in his own bed, he was in a hospital bed with bandages around his head and a tube in his arm. But this help was what he needed right now.

Dr. Francis came in and shook hands with Howard, though they'd just seen each other a few hours before. Ann got up from the chair. "Doctor?"

"Ann," he said and nodded. "Let's just first see how he's doing," the doctor said. He moved to the side of the bed and took the boy's pulse. He peeled back one eyelid and then the other. Howard and Ann stood beside the doctor and watched. Then the doctor turned back the covers and listened to the boy's heart and lungs with his stethoscope. He pressed his fingers here and there on the abdomen. When he was finished, he went to the end of the bed and studied the chart. He noted the time, scribbled something on the chart, and then looked at Howard and Ann.

"Doctor, how is he?" Howard said. "What's the matter with him exactly?"

"Why doesn't he wake up?" Ann said.

The doctor was a handsome, big-shouldered man with a tanned face. He wore a three-piece blue suit, a striped tie, and ivory cuff links. His gray hair was combed along the sides of his head, and he looked as if he had just come from a concert.

"He's all right," the doctor said. "Nothing to shout about, he could be better, I think. But he's all right. Still, I wish he'd wake up. He should wake up pretty soon." The doctor looked at the boy again. "We'll know some more in a couple of hours, after the results of a few more tests are in. But he's all right, believe me, except for the hairline fracture of the skull. He does have that."

"Oh, no," Ann said.

"And a bit of a concussion, as I said before. Of course, you know he's in shock," the doctor said. "Sometimes you see this in shock cases. This sleeping."

"But he's out of any real danger?" Howard said. "You said before he's not in a coma. You wouldn't call this a coma, then - would you, doctor?" Howard waited. He looked at the doctor.

"No, I don't want to call it a coma," the doctor said and glanced over at the boy once more. "He's just in a very deep sleep. It's a restorative measure the body is taking on its own. He's out of any real danger, I'd say that for certain, yes. But we'll know more when he wakes up and the other tests are in," the doctor said.

"It's a coma", Ann said. "Of sorts."

"It's not a coma yet, not exactly," the doctor said. "I wouldn't want to call it coma. Not yet, anyway. He's suffered shock. In shock cases, this kind of reaction is common enough; it's a temporary reaction to bodily trauma. Coma. Well, coma is a deep, prolonged unconsciousness, something that could go on for days, or weeks even. Scotty's not in that area, not as far as we can tell. I'm certain his condition will show improvement by morning. I'm betting that it will. We'll know more when he wakes up, which shouldn't be long now. Of course, you may do as you like, stay here or go home for a time. But by all means feel free to leave the hospital for a while if you want. This is not easy, I know." The doctor gazed at the boy again, watching him, and then he turned to Ann and said, "You try not to worry, little mother. Believe me, we're doing all that can be done. It's just a question of a little more time now." He nodded at her, shook hands with Howard again, and then he left the room.

Ann put her hand over the child's forehead. "At least he doesn't have a fever," she said. Then she said, "My God, he feels so cold, though. Howard? Is he supposed to feel like this? Feel his head."

Howard touched the child's temples. His own breathing had slowed. "I think he's supposed to feel this way right now," he said. "He's in shock, remember? That's what the

doctor said. The doctor was just in here. He would have said something if Scotty wasn't okay."

Ann stood there a while longer, working her lip with her teeth. Then she moved over to her chair and sat down.

Howard sat in the chair next to her chair. They looked at each other. He wanted to say something else and reassure her, but he was afraid, too. He took her hand and put it in his lap, and this made him feel better, her hand being there. He picked up her hand and squeezed it. Then he just held her hand. They sat like that for a while, watching the boy and not talking. From time to time, he squeezed her hand. Finally, she took her hand away.

"I've been praying," she said.

He nodded.

She said, "I almost thought I'd forgotten how, but it came back to me. All I had to do was close my eyes and say, 'Please God, help us – help Scotty', and then the rest was easy.

The words were right there. Maybe if you prayed, too," she said to him.

"I've already prayed," he said. "I prayed this afternoon – yesterday afternoon, I mean – after you called, while I was driving to the hospital. I've been praying," he said.

"That's good," she said. For the first time, she felt they were together in it, this trouble. She realized with a start that, until now, it had only been happening to her and to Scotty. She hadn't let Howard into it, though he was there and needed all along. She felt glad to be his wife.

The same nurse came in and took the boy's pulse again and checked the flow from the bottle hanging above the bed.

In an hour, another doctor came in. He said his name was Parsons, from Radiology. He had a bushy moustache. He was wearing loafers, a western shirt, and a pair of jeans.

"We're going to take him downstairs for more pictures," he told them. "We need to do some more pictures, and we want to do a scan."

"What's that?" Ann said. "A scan?" She stood between this new doctor and the bed. "I thought you'd already taken all your X-rays."

"I'm afraid we need some more," he said. "Nothing to be alarmed about. We just need some more pictures, and we want to do a brain scan on him."

"My God," Ann said.

"It's perfectly normal procedure in cases like this," this new doctor said. "We just need to find out for sure why he isn't back awake yet. It's normal medical procedure, and nothing to be alarmed about. We'll be taking him down in a few minutes," this doctor said.

In a little while, two orderlies came into the room with a gurney. They were black-haired, dark-complexioned men in white uniforms, and they said a few words to each other in a foreign tongue as they unhooked the boy from the tube and moved him from his bed to the gurney. Then they wheeled him from the room. Howard and Ann got on the same elevator. Ann gazed at the child. She closed her eyes as the elevator began its descent. The orderlies stood at either end of the gurney without saying anything, though once one of the men made a comment to the other in their own language, and the other man nodded slowly in response.

Later that morning, just as the sun was beginning to lighten the windows in the waiting room outside the X-ray department, they brought the boy out and moved him back up to his room. Howard and Ann rode up on the elevator with him once more, and once more they took up their places beside the bed.

**They waited** all day, but still the boy did not wake up. Occasionally, one of them would leave the room to go downstairs to the cafeteria to drink coffee and then, as if suddenly remembering and feeling guilty, get up from the table and hurry back to the room. Dr. Francis came again that afternoon and examined the boy once more and then left after telling them he was coming along and could wake up at any minute now. Nurses, different nurses from the night before, came in from time to time. Then a young man from the lab knocked and entered the room. She wore white slacks and a white blouse and carried a little tray of things which she put on the stand beside the bed. Without a word to them, she took blood from the boy's arm. Howard closed his eyes as the woman found the right place on the boy's arm and pushed the needle in.

"I don't understand this," Ann said to the woman.

"Doctor's orders," the young woman said. "I do what I'm told. They say draw that one, I draw. What's wrong with him, anyway?" she said. "He's a sweetie."

"He was hit by a car," Howard said. "A hit-and-run."

The young woman shook her head and looked again at the boy. Then she took her tray and left the room.

"Why won't he wake up?" Ann said. "Howard? I want some answers from these people." Howard didn't say anything. He sat down again in the chair and crossed one leg over the other. He rubbed his face.

He looked at his son and then he settled back in the chair, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

Ann walked to the window and looked out at the parking lot. It was night, and cars were driving into and out of the parking lot with their lights on. She stood at the window with her hands gripping the sill, and knew in her heart that they were into something now, something hard. She was afraid, and her teeth began to chatter until she tightened her jaws. She saw a big car stop in front of the hospital and someone, a woman in a long coat, get into the car. She wished she were that woman and somebody, anybody, was driving her away from here to somewhere else, a place where she would find Scotty waiting for her when she stepped out of the car, ready to say Mom and let her gather him in her arms. In a little while, Howard woke up. He looked at the boy again. Then he got up from the chair, stretched, and went over to stand beside her at the window. They both stared out at the parking lot. They didn't say anything. But they seemed to feel each other's insides now, as though the worry had made them transparent in a perfectly natural way.

The door opened and Dr. Francis came in. He was wearing a different suit and tie this time. His gray hair was combed along the sides of his head, and he looked as if he had just shaved. He went straight to the bed and examined the boy. "He ought to have come around by now. There's just no good reason for this," he said. "But I can tell you we're all convinced he's out of any danger. We'll just feel better when he wakes up. There's no reason, absolutely none, why he shouldn't come around. Very soon. Oh, he'll have himself a dilly of a headache when he does, you can count on that. But all of his signs are fine. They're as normal as can be."

"It is a coma, then?" Ann said.

The doctor rubbed his smooth cheek. "We'll call it that for the time being, until he wakes up. But you must be worn out. This is hard. I know this is hard. Fell free to go out for a bite," he said. "It would do you good. I'll put a nurse in here while you're gone if you'll feel better about going. Go and have yourselves something to eat."

"I couldn't eat anything," Ann said.

"Do what you need to do, of course," the doctor said. "Anyway, I wanted to tell you that all the signs are good, the tests are negative, nothing showed up at all, and just as soon as he wakes up he'll be over the hill."

"Thank you, doctor," Howard said. He shook hands with the doctor again. The doctor patted Howard's shoulder and went out.

"I suppose one of us should go home and check on things," Howard said. "Slug needs to be fed, for one thing."

"Call one of the neighbors," Ann said. "Call the Morgans. Anyone will feed a dog if you ask them to."

"All right," Howard said. After a while, he said, "Honey, why don't you do it? Why don't you go home and check on things, and then come back? It'll do you good. I'll be right here with him. Seriously," he said. "We need to keep up our strength on this. We'll want to be here for a while even after he wakes up."

"Why don't you go?" she said. "Feed Slug. Feed yourself."

"I already went," he said. "I was gone for exactly an hour and fifteen minutes. You go home for an hour and freshen up. Then come back."

She tried to think about it, but she was too tired. She closed her eyes and tried to think about it again. After a time, she said, "Maybe I will go home for a few minutes. Maybe if I'm not just sitting right here watching him every second, he'll wake up and be all right. You know? Maybe he'll wake up if I'm not here. I'll go home and take a bath and put on clean clothes. I'll feed Slug. Then I'll come back."

"I'll be right here," he said. "You go on home, honey. I'll keep an eye on things here."

His eyes were bloodshot and small, as if he'd been drinking for a long time. His clothes were rumpled. His beard had come out again. She touched his face, and then she took her hand back. She understood he wanted to be by himself for a while, not have to talk or share his worry for a time. She picked her purse up from the nightstand, and he helped her into her coat.

"I won't be gone long," she said.

"Just sit and rest for a little while when you get home," he said. "Eat something. Take a bath. After you get out of the bath, just sit for a while and rest. It'll do you a world of good, you'll see. Then come back," he said. "Let's try not to worry. You heard what Dr. Francis said."

She stood in her coat for a minute trying to recall the doctor's exact words, looking for any nuances, any hint of something behind his words other than what he had said. She tried to remember if his expression had changed any when he bent over to examine the child. She remembered the way his features had composed themselves as he rolled back the child's eyelids and then listened to his breathing.

She went to the door, where she turned and looked back. She looked at the child, and then she looked at the father. Howard nodded. She stepped out of the room and pulled the door closed behind her.

She went past the nurses' station and down to the end of the corridor, looking for the elevator. At the end of the corridor, she turned to her right and entered a little waiting room where a Negro family sat in wicker chairs. There was a middle-aged man in a khaki shirt and pants, a baseball cap pushed back on his head. A large woman wearing a housedress and slippers was slumped in one of the chairs. A teenaged girl in jeans, hair done in dozens of little braids, lay stretched out in one of the chairs smoking a cigarette,

her legs crossed at the ankles. The family swung their eyes to Ann as she entered the room. The little table was littered with hamburger wrappers and Styrofoam cups.

“Franklin,” the large woman said as she roused herself. “Is it about Franklin?” Her eyes widened. “Tell me now, lady,” the woman said. “Is it Franklin?” She was trying to rise from her chair, but the man had closed his hand over her arm.

“Here, here,” he said. “Evelyn.”

“I’m sorry,” Ann said. “I’m looking for the elevator. My son is in the hospital, and now I can’t find the elevator.”

“Elevator is down that way, turn left,” the man said as he aimed a finger.

The girl drew on her cigarette and stared at Ann. Her eyes were narrowed to slits, and her broad lips parted slowly as the smoke escaped. The Negro woman let her head fall on her shoulder and looked away from Ann, no longer interested.

“My son was hit by a car,” Ann said to the man. She seemed to need to explain herself.

“He has a concussion and a little skull fracture, but he’s going to be all right. He’s in shock now, but it might be some kind of coma, too. That’s what really worries us, the coma part. I’m going out for the little while, but my husband is with him. Maybe he’ll wake up while I’m gone.”

“That’s too bad,” the man said and shifted in the chair. He shook his head. He looked down at the table, and then he looked back at Ann. She was still standing there. He said, “Our Franklin, he’s on the operating table. Somebody cut him. Tried to kill him. There was a fight where he was at. At this party. They say he was just standing and watching. Not bothering nobody. But that don’t mean nothing these days. Now he’s on the operating table. We’re just hoping and praying, that’s all we can do now.” He gazed at her steadily. Ann looked at the girl again, who was still watching her, and at the older woman, who kept her head down, but whose eyes were now closed. Ann saw the lips moving silently, making words. She had an urge to ask what those words were. She wanted to talk more with these people who were in the same kind of waiting she was in. She was afraid, and they were afraid. They had that in common. She would have liked to have said something else about the accident, told them more about Scotty, that it had happened on the day of his birthday. Monday, and that he was still unconscious. Yet she didn’t know how to begin. She stood looking at them without saying anything more.

She went down the corridor the man had indicated and found the elevator. She waited a minute in front of the closed doors, still wondering if she was doing the right thing. Then she put out her finger and touched the button.

**She pulled** into the driveway and cut the engine. She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the wheel for a minute. She listened to the ticking sounds the engine made as it began to cool. Then she got out of the car. She could hear the dog barking inside the house. She went to the front door, which was unlocked. She went inside and turned on lights and put on a kettle of water for tea. She opened some dog food and fed Slug on the back porch. The dog ate in hungry little smacks. It kept running into the kitchen to see that she was going to stay. As she sat down on the sofa with her tea, the telephone rang.

“Yes!” she said as she answered. “Hello!”

“Mrs. Weiss,” a man’s voice said. It was five o’clock in the morning, and she thought she could hear machinery or equipment of some kind in the background.

“Yes, yes! What is it?” she said. “This is Mrs. Weiss. This is she. What is it, please?” She listened to whatever it was in the background. “Is it Scotty, for Christ’s sake?”

“Scotty,” the man’s voice said. “It’s about Scotty, yes. It has to do with Scotty, that problem. Have you forgotten about Scotty?” the man said. Then he hung up.

She dialed the hospital’s number and asked for the third floor. She demanded information about her son from the nurse who answered the telephone. Then she asked to speak to her husband. It was, she said, an emergency.

She waited, turning the telephone cord in her fingers. She closed her eyes and felt sick at her stomach. She would have to make herself eat. Slug came in from the back porch and lay down near her feet. He wagged his tail. She pulled at his ear while he licked her fingers. Howard was on the line.

“Somebody just called here,” she said. She twisted the telephone cord. “He said it was about Scotty,” she cried.

“Scotty’s fine,” Howard told her. “I mean, he’s still sleeping. There’s been no change. The nurse has been in twice since you’ve been gone. A nurse or else a doctor. He’s all right.”

“This man called. He said it was about Scotty,” she told him.

“Honey, you rest for a little while, you need the rest. It must be that same caller I had. Just forget it. Come back down here after you’ve rested. Then we’ll have breakfast or something.”

“Breakfast,” she said. “I don’t want any breakfast.”

“You know what I mean,” he said. “Juice, something. I don’t know. I don’t know anything, Ann. Jesus, I’m not hungry, either. Ann, it’s hard to talk now. I’m standing here at the desk. Dr. Francis is coming again at eight o’clock this morning. He’s going to have something to tell us then, something more definite. That’s what one of the nurses said. She didn’t know any more than that. Ann? Honey, maybe we’ll know something more then. At eight o’clock. Come back here before eight. Meanwhile, I’m right here and Scotty’s all right. He’s still the same,” he added.

“I was drinking a cup of tea,” she said, “when the telephone rang. They said it was about Scotty. There was a noise in the background on that call you had, Howard?”

“I don’t remember,” he said. “Maybe the driver of the car, maybe he’s a psychopath and found out about Scotty somehow. But I’m here with him. Just rest like you were going to do. Take a bath and come back by seven or so, and we’ll talk to the doctor together when he gets here. It’s going to be all right, honey. I’m here, and there are doctors and nurses around. They say his condition is stable.”

“I’m scared to death,” she said.

She ran water, undressed, and got into the tub. She washed and dried quickly, not taking the time to wash her hair. She put on clean underwear, wool slacks, and a sweater. She went into the living room, where the dog looked up at her and let its tail thump once against the floor. It was just starting to get light outside when she went out to the car. She drove into the parking lot of the hospital and found a space close to the front door. She felt she was in some obscure way responsible for what had happened to the child. She let her thoughts move to the Negro family. She remembered the name Franklin and the table that was covered with hamburger papers, and the teenaged girl staring at her as she drew on her cigarette. “Don’t have children,” she told the girl’s image as she entered the front door of the hospital. “For God’s sake, don’t.”

**She took** the elevator up to the third floor with two nurses who were just going on duty. It was Wednesday morning, a few minutes before seven. There was a page for Dr. Madison

as the elevator doors slid open on the third floor. She got off behind the nurses, who turned in the other direction and continued the conversation she had interrupted when she'd gotten into the elevator. She walked down the corridor to the little alcove where the Negro family had been waiting. They were gone now, but the chairs were scattered in such a way that it looked as if people had just jumped up from them the minute before. The tabletop was cluttered with the same cups and papers, the ashtray was filled with cigarette butts.

She stopped at the nurses' station. A nurse was standing behind the counter, brushing her hair and yawning.

"There was a Negro boy in surgery last night," Ann said. "Franklin was his name. His family was in the waiting room. I'd like to inquire about his condition."

A nurse who was sitting at a desk behind the counter looked up from a chart in front of her. The telephone buzzed and she picked up the receiver, but she kept her eyes on Ann.

"He passed away," said the nurse at the counter. The nurse held the hairbrush and kept looking at her. "Are you a friend of the family or what?"

"I met the family last night," Ann said. "My own son is in the hospital. I guess he's in shock. We don't know for sure what's wrong. I just wondered about Franklin, that's all. Thank you." She moved down the corridor. Elevator doors the same color as the walls slid open and a gaunt, bald man in white pants and white canvas shoes pulled a heavy cart off the elevator. She hadn't noticed these doors last night. The man wheeled the cart out into the corridor and stopped in front of the room nearest the elevator and consulted a clipboard. Then he reached down and slid a tray out of the cart. He rapped lightly on the door and entered the room. She could smell the unpleasant odors of warm food as she passed the cart. She hurried on without looking at any of the nurses and pushed open the door to the child's room.

Howard was standing at the window with his hands behind his back. He turned around as she came in.

"How is he?" she said. She went over to the bed. She dropped her purse on the floor beside the nightstand. It seemed to her she had been gone a long time. She touched the child's face. "Howard?"

"Dr. Francis was here a little while ago," Howard said. She looked at him closely and thought his shoulders were bunched a little.

"I thought he wasn't coming until eight o'clock this morning," she said quickly.

"There was another doctor with him. A neurologist."

"A neurologist," she said.

Howard nodded. His shoulders were bunching, she could see that. "What'd they say, Howard? For Christ's sake, what'd they say? What is it?"

"They said they're going to take him down and run more tests on him, Ann. They think they're going to operate, honey. Honey, they are going to operate. They can't figure out why he won't wake up. It's more than just shock or concussion, they know that much now. It's in his skull, the fracture, it has something, something to do with that, they think. So, they're going to operate. I tried to call you, but I guess you'd already left the house."

"Oh, God," she said. "Oh, please, Howard, please," she said, taking his arms.

"Look!" Howard said. "Scotty! Look, Ann!" He turned her toward the bed.

The boy had opened his eyes, then closed them. He opened them again now. The eyes stared straight ahead for a minute, then moved slowly in his head until they rested on Howard and Ann, then traveled away again.

“Scotty,” his mother said, moving to the bed.

“Hey, Scott,” his father said. “Hey, son.”

They leaned over the bed. Howard took the child’s hand in his hands and began to pat and squeeze the hand. Ann bent over the boy and kissed his forehead again and again. She put her hands on either side of his face. “Scotty, honey, it’s Mommy and Daddy,” she said.

“Scotty?”

The boy looked at them, but without any sign of recognition. Then his mouth opened, his eyes scrunched closed, and he howled until he had no more air in his lungs. His face seemed to relax and soften then. His lips parted as his last breath was puffed through his throat and exhaled gently through the clenched teeth.

**The doctors** called it a hidden occlusion and said it was a one-in-a-million circumstance. Maybe if it could have been detected somehow and surgery undertaken immediately, they could have saved him. But more than likely not. In any case, what would they have been looking for? Nothing had shown up in the tests or in the X-rays.

Dr. Francis was shaken. “I can’t tell you how badly I feel. I’m so very sorry, I can’t tell you,” he said as he led them into the doctors’ lounge. There was a doctor sitting in a chair with his legs hooked over the back of another chair, watching an early-morning TV show. He was wearing a green delivery-room outfit, loose green pants and green blouse, and a green cap that covered his hair. He looked at Howard and Ann and then looked at Dr. Francis. He got to his feet and turned off the set and went out of the room. Dr. Francis guided Ann to the sofa, sat down beside her, and began to talk in a low, consoling voice. At one point, he leaned over and embraced her. She could feel his chest rising and falling evenly against her shoulder. She kept her eyes open and let him hold her. Howard went into the bathroom, but he left the door open. After a violent fit of weeping, he ran water and washed his face. Then he came out and sat down at the little table that held a telephone. He looked at the telephone as though deciding what to do first. He made some calls. After a time, Dr. Francis used the telephone.

“Is there anything else I can do for the moment?” he asked them.

Howard shook his head. Ann stared at Dr. Francis as if unable to comprehend his words. The doctor walked them to the hospital’s front door. People were entering and leaving the hospital. It was eleven o’clock in the morning. Ann was aware of how slowly, almost reluctantly, she moved her feet. It seemed to her that Dr. Francis was making them leave when she felt they should stay, when it would be more the right thing to do to stay. She gazed out into the parking lot and then turned around and looked back at the front of the hospital. She began shaking her head. “No, no,” she said. “I can’t leave him here, no.” She heard herself say that and thought how unfair it was that the only words that came out were the sort of words used on TV shows where people were stunned by violent or sudden deaths. She wanted her words to be her own. “No,” she said and for some reason the memory of the Negro woman’s head lolling on the woman’s shoulder came to her.

“No,” she said again.

“I’ll be talking to you later in the day,” the doctor was saying to Howard. “There are still some things that have to be done, things that have to be cleared up to our satisfaction. Some things that need explaining.”

“An autopsy,” Howard said.

Dr. Francis nodded.

“I understand,” Howard said. Then he said, “Oh, Jesus. No, I don’t understand, doctor. I can’t, I can’t. I just can’t.”

Dr. Francis put his arm around Howard’s shoulders. “I’m sorry. God, how I’m sorry.” He let go of Howard’s shoulders and held out his hand. Howard looked at the hand, and then he took it. Dr. Francis put his arms around Ann once more. He seemed full of some goodness she didn’t understand. She let her head rest on his shoulder, but her eyes stayed open. She kept looking at the hospital. As they drove out of the parking lot, she looked back at the hospital.

**At home**, she sat on the sofa with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard closed the door to the child’s room. He got the coffee-maker going and then he found an empty box. He had thought to pick up some of the child’s things that were scattered around the living room. But instead he sat down beside her on the sofa, pushed the box to one side, and leaned forward, arms between knees. He began to weep. She pulled his head over into her lap and patted his shoulder. “He’s gone,” she said. She kept patting his shoulder. Over his sobs, she could hear the coffee-maker hissing in the kitchen. “There, there,” she said tenderly. “Howard, he’s gone. He’s gone and now we’ll have to get used to that. To being alone.”

In a little while, Howard got up and began moving aimlessly around the room with the box, not putting anything into it, but collecting some things together on the floor at one end the sofa. She continued to sit with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard put the box down and brought coffee into the living room. Later, Ann made calls to relatives. After each call had been placed and the party had answered, Ann would blurt out a few words and cry for a minute. Then she would quietly explain, in a measured voice, what had happened and tell them about arrangements. Howard took the box out to the garage, where he saw the child’s bicycle. He dropped the box and sat down on the pavement beside the bicycle. He took hold of the bicycle awkwardly so that it leaned against his chest. He held it, the rubber pedal sticking into his chest. He gave the wheel a turn. Ann hung up the telephone after talking to her sister. She was looking up another number when the telephone rang. She picked it up on the first ring.

“Hello,” she said, and she heard something in the background, a humming noise. “Hello!” she said. “For God’s sake,” she said. “Who is this? What is it you want?”

“Your Scotty, I got him ready for you,” the man’s voice said. “Did you forget him?”

“You evil bastard!” she shouted into the receiver. “How can you do this, you evil son of a bitch?”

“Scotty,” the man said. “Have you forgotten about Scotty?” Then the man hung up on her.

Howard heard the shouting and came in to find her with her head on her arms over the table, weeping. He picked up the receiver and listened to the dial tone.

Much later, just before midnight, after they had dealt with many things, the telephone rang again.

“You answer it,” she said. “Howard, it’s him. I know.” They were sitting at the kitchen table with coffee in front of them. Howard had a small glass of whiskey beside his cup. He answered on the third ring.

“Hello,” he said. “Who is this? Hello, hello!” The line went dead. “He hung up,” Howard said. “Whoever it was.”

“It was him,” he said. “That bastard. I’d like to kill him,” she said. “I’d like to shoot him and watch him kick,” she said.

“Ann, my God,” he said.

“Could you hear anything?” she said. “In the background? A noise, machinery, something humming?”

“Nothing, really. Nothing like that,” he said. “There wasn’t much time. I think there was some radio music. Yes, there was a radio going, that’s all I could tell. I don’t know what in God’s name is going on,” he said.

She shook her head. “If I could, could get my hands on him.” It came to her then. She knew who it was. Scotty, the cake, the telephone number. She pushed the chair away from the table and got up. “Drive me down to the shopping center,” she said. “Howard.” “What are you saying?”

”The shopping center. I know who it is who’s calling. I know who it is. It’s the baker, the son-of-a-bitching baker, Howard. I had him bake a cake for Scotty’s birthday. That’s who’s calling. That’s who has the number and keeps calling us. To harass us about that cake. The baker, that bastard.”

They drove down to the shopping center. The sky was clear and stars were out. It was cold, and they ran the heater in the car. They parked in front of the bakery. All of the shops and stores were closed, but there were cars at the far end of the lot in front of the movie theater. The bakery windows were dark, but when they looked through the glass they could see light in the back room and, now and then, a big man in an apron moving in and out of the white, even light. Through the glass, she could see the display cases and some little tables with chairs. She tried the door. She rapped on the glass. But if the baker heard them, he gave no sign. He didn’t look in their direction.

They drove around behind the bakery and parked. They got out of the car. There was a lighted window too high up for them to see inside. A sign near the back door said THE PANTRY BAKERY, SPECIAL ORDERS. She could hear faintly a radio playing inside and something creak – an oven door as it was pulled down? She knocked on the door and waited. Then she knocked again, louder. The radio was turned down and there was a scraping sound now, the distinct sound of something, a drawer, being pulled open and then closed.

Someone unlocked the door and opened it. The baker stood in the light and peered at them. “I’m closed for business,” he said. “What do you want at this hour? It’s midnight. Are you drunk or something?”

She stepped into the light that fell through the open door. He blinked his heavy eyelids as he recognized her. “It’s you,” he said.

“It’s me,” she said. “Scotty’s mother. This is Scotty’s father. We’d like to come in.”

The baker said, “I’m busy now. I have work to do.”

She had stepped inside the doorway anyway. Howard came in behind her. The baker moved back. “It smells like a bakery in here. Doesn’t it smell like a bakery in here, Howard?”

“What do you want?” the baker said. “Maybe you want your cake? That’s it, you decided you want your cake. You ordered a cake, didn’t you?”

“You’re pretty smart for a baker,” she said. “Howard, this is the man who’s been calling us.” She clenched her fists. She stared at him fiercely. There was a deep burning inside her, an anger that made her feel larger than herself, larger than either of these men.

“Just a minute here,” the baker said. “You want to pick up your three-day-old cake? That it? I don’t want to argue with you, lady. There it sits over there, getting stale. I’ll give it to you for half of what I quoted you. No. You want it? You can have it. It’s no good to anyone now. It cost me time and money to make that cake. If you want it, okay, if you don’t, that’s okay, too. I have to get back to work.” He looked at them and rolled his tongue behind his teeth.

“More cakes,” she said. She knew she was in control of it, of what was increasing in her. She was calm.

“Lady, I work sixteen hours a day in this place to earn a living,” the baker said. He wiped his hands on his apron. “I work night and day in here, trying to make ends meet.” A look crossed Ann’s face that made the baker move back and say, “No trouble, now.” He reached to the counter and picked up a rolling pin with his right hand and began to tap it against the palm of his other hand. “You want the cake or not? I have to get back to work. Bakers work at night,” he said again. His eyes were small, mean-looking, she thought, nearly lost in the bristly flesh around his cheeks. His neck was thick with fat.

“I know bakers work at night,” Ann said. “They make phone calls at night, too. You bastard,” she said.

The baker continued to tap the rolling pin against his hand. He glanced at Howard.

“Careful, careful,” he said to Howard.

“My son’s dead,” she said with a cold, even finality. “He was hit by a car Monday morning. We’ve been waiting with him until he died. But of course, you couldn’t be expected to know that, could you? Bakers can’t know everything – can they, Mr. Baker? But he’s dead. He’s dead, you bastard!” Just as suddenly as it had welled in her, the anger dwindled, gave way to something else, a dizzy feeling of nausea. She leaned against the wooden table that was sprinkled with flour, put her hands over her face, and began to cry, her shoulders rocking back and forth. “It isn’t fair,” she said. “It isn’t, isn’t fair.”

Howard put his hand at the small of her back and looked at the baker. “Shame on you,” Howard said to him. “Shame”.

The baker put the rolling pin back on the counter. He undid his apron and threw it on the counter. He looked at them, and then he shook his head slowly. He pulled a chair out from under the card table that held papers and receipts, an adding machine, and a telephone directory. “Please sit down,” he said. “Let me get you a chair,” he said to Howard. “Sit down now, please.” The baker went into the front of the shop and returned with two little wrought-iron chairs. “Please sit down, you people.”

Ann wiped her eyes and looked at the baker. “I wanted to kill you,” she said. “I wanted you dead.”

The baker had cleared a space for them at the table. He shoved the adding machine to one side, along with the stacks of notepaper and receipts. He pushed the telephone directory onto the floor, where it landed with a thud. Howard and Ann sat down and pulled their chairs up to the table. The baker sat down, too.

“Let me say how sorry I am,” the baker said, putting his elbows on the table. “God alone knows how sorry. Listen to me. I’m just a baker. I don’t claim to be anything else. Maybe once, maybe years ago, I was a different kind of human being. I’ve forgotten, I don’t know for sure. But I’m not any longer, if I ever was. Now I’m just a baker. That don’t excuse my doing what I did, I know. But I’m deeply sorry. I’m sorry for your son, and sorry for my part in this,” the baker said. He spread his hands out on the table and turned them over to reveal his palms. “I don’t have any children myself, so I can only imagine

what you must be feeling. All I can say to you now is that I'm sorry. Forgive me, if you can," the baker said. "I'm not an evil man, I don't think. Not evil, like you said on the phone. You got to understand what it comes down to is I don't know how to act anymore, it would seem. Please," the man said, "let me ask you if you can find it in your hearts to forgive me?"

It was warm inside the bakery. Howard stood up from the table and took off his coat. He helped Ann from her coat. The baker looked at them for a minute and then nodded and got up from the table. He went to the oven and turned off some switches. He found cups and poured coffee from an electric coffee-maker. He put a carton of cream on the table, and a bowl of sugar.

"You probably need to eat something," the baker said. "I hope you'll eat some of my hot rolls. You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this," he said.

He served them warm cinnamon rolls just out of the oven, the icing still runny. He put butter on the table and knives to spread the butter. Then the baker sat down at the table with them. He waited. He waited until they each took a roll from the platter and began to eat. "It's good to eat something," he said, watching them. "There's more. Eat up. Eat all you want. There's all the rolls in the world in here."

They ate rolls and drank coffee. Ann was suddenly hungry, and the rolls were warm and sweet. She ate three of them, which pleased the baker. Then he began to talk. They listened carefully. Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say. They nodded when the baker began to speak of loneliness, and of the sense of doubt and limitation that had come to him in his middle years. He told them what it was like to be childless all these years. To repeat the days with the ovens endlessly full and endlessly empty. The party food, the celebrations he'd worked over. Icing knuckle-deep. The tiny wedding couples stuck into cakes. Hundreds of them, no, thousands by now. Birthdays. Just imagine all those candles burning. He had a necessary trade. He was a baker. He was glad he wasn't a florist. It was better to be feeding people. This was a better smell anytime than flowers.

"Smell this," the baker said, breaking open a dark loaf. "It's a heavy bread, but rich." They smelled it, then he had them taste it. It had the taste of molasses and coarse grains. They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was like daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high, pale cast of light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving.

## **NOTES ON A *SMALL, GOOD THING***

### **I. Pre-Reading Writing**

#### **A. The Birthday Boy**

Recollect a birthday in your family between the time you were 5 and 8 years old. Brainstorm a list of activities the people involved were pursuing. How was the birthday celebrated? What, if anything, was special: food preparation, decoration, special clothing, special accoutrements (i.e. pinata), special music, or a special place? Were all birthdays treated equally or were some celebrated in more special ways than others (i.e. because they fell near a holiday, or because there were several family birthdays in the same month)?

1. Free-write in your blog journal for ten minutes about early birthday memories.

Bring the entry to your class.

2. Small-group activity. Discuss notes of memories in your group.

3. Small-group activity.

- Retell the events of the recollected birthday (yours or someone else's) with your group-mates.
- Focus on how special or excited the celebrant usually felt – in your culture.
- Focus on how much participation there was in the ceremony on the part of the parents, siblings, other family, and schoolmates.

### **B. The Hospital Wait**

Remember one time when someone in your family or someone else that you love (not you) got sick and had to go to the clinic or emergency room. How did the sick or injured one behave? What symptoms were there of sickness or injury? How much time was spent waiting for information about the loved one? How did that time pass: slowly, painfully? What did you do with your nervous energy during that interval? Were you able to stay by the side of the sick one? Were you able to leave their side? Did you feel sorrowful/guilty about leaving? Did you leave? Did you feel curious about or did you feel sympathy with the stories of other families waiting for news from the doctors about loved ones? What happened to patient? Recovery? Release? Admission to hospital? Death?

1. Write a recollection of a time you waited in the hospital or clinic for a friend or a loved one.
2. Peer edit and compare notes on your recollections with your deskmate.

## **II. While-Reading Writing**

### **A. Worksheet # 1**

While reading *A Small, Good Thing* keep a list of all the characters that appear in the text and make brief notes about what you thought or felt reading about each one.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_\_

13. \_\_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_\_

15. \_\_\_\_\_

16. \_\_\_\_\_

**B.** Draw a character chart showing the relationship of each character to the others and compare drawings in small groups. Plot a relationship map among the fifteen characters.

### **III. Post-Reading Writing**

#### **A. Worksheet # 2**

With your deskmate, outline the events of the story while the parents are at Scotty's side in the hospital. Try to divide the events into separate calendar days. Consider the visits of Dr. Francis and other medical staff, the various trips to home, and the anonymous phone calls. What, if anything, about this structure seems significant to you? How does this outline help your understanding of the story?

Day #1

Compare your outline with another pair of students in the class. What are the discrepancies between the two outlines? Can they be definitely resolved or are the times of the events open to interpretation?

**B. Instructions for worksheet # 3**

1. Class discussion: What do the quotes refer to in the story?
2. Write who says a particular quote. Check your answer with your deskmate.
3. Write what happens next in the story. Check your answers in small groups.
4. With each student or pair of students holding a single quote from the page, arrange themselves in order across the room to match the chronology of the story. Class discussion to verify that the arrangement is correct.
5. Identify disagreements and misunderstandings. Notice where the text is definite and where different reader interpretations are possible.

**C. Worksheet # 3**

1. I work night and day in here ... \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Scotty, honey, it's Mommy and Daddy. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. We are just hoping and praying. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Nothing to be alarmed about.  
We just need some more pictures. \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. We don't have to worry.  
He's just sleeping now, that's all. \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Slug needs to be fed, for one thing. \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. I think you should both feel free  
to do that, if you wish. \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. He's going to be all right.  
Dr. Francis knows what's what. \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. I wanted to kill you. I wanted you dead. \_\_\_\_\_

10. Don't have children. For God's sake, don't. \_\_\_\_\_

11. You try not to worry, little mother. \_\_\_\_\_

12. Scotty, have you forgotten about Scotty? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **D. In-class writing**

How do you feel about the treatment of the parents by the hospital staff? Write for ten minutes in your journal about this question. Write 5-minute responses to these journal entries for at least two of your classmates in small groups. If no in-class time, use BLOG.COM mechanism for this journaling.

**E. Assignment:** Write a letter to the hospital administrator at the hospital where 'Scotty' died. Let the administrator know what you think of the care that was given to Scotty and to his parents during his brief stay there. (3-5 paragraphs)

**F.** Teacher distributes letters from the previous assignment.

With your deskmate, assume the role and negotiate an answer in the voice of one of the medical staff who dealt with Scotty. In class write a 3-paragraph response to the letter that has been forwarded to you by the hospital administrator.

G. Elisabeth Kubler–Ross, M.D., is a medical doctor, psychiatrist, and internationally known thanatologist. Read. more on Kubler-Ross in the box.

**Name:** Dr. Elisabeth Kübler–Ross

**Qualifications:** medical doctor, psychiatrist, and an internationally known thanatologist.

**Books:** *On Death and Dying*

*Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*

*Living with Death and Dying*

*Aids*

*On Children and Death*

**Fame:** She identified five stages of approaching death: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages are enacted not only by the dying person, but also by their loved ones, and by the medical staff who cares for them.

**Aim:** education of those involved in the management of terminally ill.

**Educational strategy:** interviews, debates, conversations with patients, their families and the medical staff and books reporting findings on the above.

Dr. Kübler-Ross believes that hospital personnel in all fields, medical and counseling, often lose opportunities to experience the wonders of the coping mechanisms of the human spirit, because of their lack of ease with impending death. Medical personnel are being trained specifically in professional medical content, they are not being trained in communication skills and attitude management. This means that, on the one hand, medical personnel miss an opportunity for personal growth, but on the other hand, they also fail to meet the expectations of those in need of spiritual - not only technical - support at the time of death. If medicine is to remain a humanitarian and respected profession, its representatives should be trained in the simple matters of tact, sensitivity, perceptiveness, and good taste in the management of suffering.

Often medical staff are judged exclusively by their technical performance, with a total disregard for their native or trained spiritual intelligence. There is a difference between *breaking bad news* and *sharing painful information*. Medical professionals should not feel at a loss for words and attitudes when faced with such stressful interpersonal contact. They should be trained to be aware of their own attitudes toward critical illness and death so that they are able to talk about these matters without projecting anxiety. It is an art to share painful news, but it is an art that can be taught and practiced with the satisfaction of knowing that the professional can thus bring some comfort to the patients and to their families. This cannot be accomplished without empathy.

**H.** Examine the text of *A Small, Good Thing* with these stages in mind. What evidence is there of the parents passing through denial about Scottie's condition, anger, bargaining, depression, and final acceptance? What stages do you think the medical staff are in, as they deal with Scottie's parents? In small groups discuss the development of these characters as they progress through the stages of coping with death.

**J.** Assume the voices of one of the parents and one of the medical staff and write ca 75-word diary entries for each of them at some time during Scottie's hospitalization.

**K. Worksheet # 4: Reading Professional Journals**

1. In the light of these issues, can you predict what an article with the title

*Gastroenterologists Disagree on Telling the Whole Truth* deals with?

2. Skim the article below and answer these general questions:

- Which geographical regions are surveyed and what is the issue?
- What is the main trend in Asian societies compared to that of other cultures in the Pacific region which have an Anglo-Saxon tradition (i.e. Australia and New Zealand)?
- What are the two polarized positions found among residents of Japan who answered the survey?

3. Scan the article for the following details:

- How many hypothetical case histories were presented in the survey? List the case studies mentioned in the article. Can you imagine what the other two cases could be?
- Who thinks that the decision should be based on two factors: family and patient?
- Who is the “odd man out” in the list of experts mentioned in the article?

### **Gastroenterologists Disagree on Telling Whole Truth**

John McConnell, Science and Medicine "News"  
The Lancet, Vol. 348/ September 28, 1996, p 879

<sup>1</sup>The results of a survey in Asian and Pacific countries on whether patients should be told the truth about their diagnoses and prognoses have revealed wide differences in ethical attitudes among Gastroenterologists.

<sup>2</sup>The survey, described by Kenichi Ido (Jichi Medical School, Japan) at the tenth Asian-Pacific Congress of Gastroenterology (Sept. 21-23, Yokohama, Japan) used a series of questions based on five hypothetical case histories to assess ethical attitudes among 949 gastroenterologists in 12 countries. <sup>3</sup>There were striking differences between countries. <sup>4</sup>In one example - a man with a diagnosis of gastric carcinoma who did not ask about his condition - all 16 doctors in New Zealand who responded said that they would tell the patient the truth, whereas only 32.7% (out of 492 respondents) in Japan said they would, and only 1% in Vietnam (33 respondents) said they would tell the patient. <sup>5</sup>In a second example, where the patient asked directly about his results, 71.5% of Japanese doctors said they would tell the truth but only 15.2% of Vietnamese doctors. <sup>6</sup>In all countries, except New Zealand, the majority of doctors said they would reveal the true nature of the patient's disease to a close family member.

<sup>7</sup>Another of the test scenarios involved a man with gastric cancer who wished to know about his condition but whose wife had previously asked the doctor not to tell him the truth. <sup>8</sup>In this situation, only in New Zealand, Australia, and Hong Kong would the majority of doctors tell the patient the truth about his diagnosis and prognosis.

<sup>9</sup>Commenting on the results of the survey, Carol Stanciu (University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Gr.T.Popa" Iasi, Romania), chair of the ethical committee of the World Organization of Gastroenterology, said that, "If we do not tell the truth we no longer respect the relationship of confidence." <sup>10</sup>James St. John (Royal Melbourne Hospital, Australia) added that it was impossible to plan future management without the patient understanding the true circumstances of his or her illness, and that the doctor's responsibility was to the patient, not to the family. <sup>11</sup>Gen Ohi (University of Tokyo, Japan) noted that in Asian societies the framework of the family was well preserved, and that it was important to respect the family - as well as the autonomy of the patient - because of the family's important role in caring and providing for the patient.

<sup>12</sup>Maintenance of hope was also cited by two speakers, Ha-Van Mao (Tran Hung Dao Central Hospital, Vietnam) and H Ali Sulaiman (University of Indonesia) as a reason for not always telling the patient the truth.

<sup>13</sup>But how do patients feel? <sup>14</sup>Mitsuru Sasako (National Cancer Center Hospital, Japan) said that previous surveys of patients' attitudes in Japan indicate that around 90% want to know their diagnosis and prognosis. <sup>15</sup>However, according to Horomasa Ishii (Keio University, Japan), only 18% of Japanese cancer patients knew of their disease before they died. <sup>16</sup>Clearly, doctors still need to give more thought to the relative importance of the individual and the family when discussing medical diagnoses.

**L. Worksheet # 5**

Re-read *A Small, Good Thing* from the point at which the parents drove down to the shopping center to the end. On this page:

- explore what you find significant, confusing, what you like or what interests you most
- raise questions about the text

In small groups, attempt to resolve questions together.

### **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

A child died and the mother was so stricken with grief that she could not give the child up for burial. She went to the nearby monastery, carrying the dead child, and crying for the medicine that would make her child well again. The monk told her that the medicine required in such a case was a small handful of mustard seeds which the mother herself must gather one-by-one from each of the homes of the town in which there had never been a death of a loved one.

The woman ran to the town and started knocking at every door asking if this was a house which death had never visited. At the end of the day, the woman walked back to the monastery. She had gathered no mustard seeds. She handed the body of her child to the monk for burial.

adapted from The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha, Edwin A. Burtt, ed., Jan. 1989

**M.** Focus your attention on the baker's words, towards the end of the discussion with the grieving family: *Forgive me if you can, I'm not an evil man, I don't think ... You got to understand what it comes down to is I don't know how to act anymore....*

Free write for fifteen minutes about how you understand these words. Try to clarify what you think is the problem with the baker and his life scheme. What has the baker said about his life that helps to clarify the statement above? His life, like his ovens, is full (of work) and empty (of relationships). How typical is this of the human condition? Can you relate to this attitude of spiritual defeat?

**N.** Read the following excerpt from Studs Terkel's Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do, 1972, N.Y.: Pantheon Books.

Imagine and role play a conversation held during the lunch break between Phil Stallings and Brophy, the young man preparing to go to the college, while working at the Ford assembly plant.

### The Making: Phil Stallings (pp 159-161)

He is a spot-welder at the Ford assembly plant on the far South Side of Chicago. He is twenty-seven years old: recently married. He works the third shift: 3:30 p.m. to midnight. "I start the automobile, the first welds. From there it goes to another line where the floor's put on, the roof, the trunk, the hood, the doors. Then it's put on a frame. There is hundreds of lines. The welding gun's got a square handle, with a button on the top for high voltage and a button on the bottom for low. The first is to clamp the metal together. The second is to fuse it. The gun hangs from a ceiling, over tables that ride on a track. It travels in a circle, oblong, like an egg. You stand on a cement platform, maybe six inches from the ground. "I stand in one spot, about 2 or 3 feet area, all night. The only time a person stops is when the line stops. We do about 32 jobs per car, per unit, 48 units an hour, eight hours a day, 32 times 48 times 8. Figure it out. That's how many times I push that button. The noise, oh it's tremendous. You open your mouth and you're liable to get a mouthful of sparks. (shows his arms) That's a burn, these are burns. You don't compete against the noise. You got to yell and at the same time you're straining to maneuver the gun to where you have to weld.

You got some guys that are uptight, and they're not sociable. It's too rough. You pretty much stay to yourself. You get involved with yourself. You dream, you think of things you've done. I drift back continuously to when I was a kid and what me and my brothers did. The things you love most are the things you drift back into. Lots of times I worked from the time I started to the time of the break and I never realized I had even worked ... When you dream, you reduce the chances of friction with the foreman or with the next guy. It don't stop. It just goes and goes and goes. I bet there's men who have lived and died out there, never seen the end of that line. And they never will - because it's endless. It's like a serpent. It' just all body, no tail. It can do things to you ...

(Laughs.) Repetition is such that if you were to think about the job itself, you'd slowly go out of your mind. You'd let your problems build up, you'd get to a point where you'd be at the fellow next to you - his throat. Every time the foreman came by and looked at you, you'd have something to say. You just strike out at anything you can. So if you involve yourself by yourself, you overcome this. I don't like the pressure, the intimidation. How would you like to go up to someone and say, "I would like to go to the bathroom?" If the foreman doesn't like you, he'll make you hold it. Just ignore you. Should I leave this job to go the bathroom I risk being fired. The line moves all the time. I work next to Jim Grayson and he's preoccupied. The guy on my left, he's a Mexican, speaking Spanish, so it's pretty hard to understand him. You just avoid him. Brophy, he's a young fella, he's going to college. He works catty-corner from me. Him and I talk from time to time. If he ain't in the

mood, I don't talk. If I ain't in the mood, he knows it. Oh sure, there's tension here. It's not always obvious, but the whites stay with the whites and the coloreds stay with the coloreds. When you go into Ford, Ford says, "Can you work with other men?" This stops a lot of trouble, cause when you're working side by side with a guy, they can't afford to have guys fighting. When two men don't socialize, that means two guys are gonna do more work, know what I mean? I don't understand how come more guys don't flip. Because you're nothing more than a machine when you hit this type of thing. They give better care to that machine than they will to you. They'll have more respect, give more attention to that machine. And you KNOW this. Somehow you get the feeling that the machine is better than you are. (Laughs.)

You really begin to wonder. What price do they put on me? Look at the price they put on the machine. If that machine breaks down there is somebody out there to fix it right away. If I break down, I'm just pushed over to the other side till another takes my place. The only thing they have on their mind is to keep that line running.

I'll do the best I can. I believe in an eight-hour pay for an eight-hour day. But I will not try to outreach my limits. If I can't cut it I just don't do it. I've been there three years and I keep my nose pretty clean. I never cussed anybody or anything like that. But I've had some real brushes with the foreman.

### **O. Homework assignment**

Interview a person you know or a person whom you encounter in their work, who has a job which involves the daily repetition of a manual operation, for which there is no permanent physical product and limited human contact: baker, bus driver, trash collector etc. Try to determine from these workers what satisfactions and what frustrations they encounter in their work life. If possible, try to find someone who has been at the same work for several years. Report back to the class the content of the interview.

**P. In-class writing**

Pick a character from *A Small, Good Thing*. Think of a problem or a troublesome situation in your life. How do you think this character would react if placed in your life situation? Free write for ten minutes.

**Q. Worksheet # 6**

You are a movie scriptwriter working with the text of *A Small, Good Thing*. Consider the paragraph which follows the sentence: *Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say*. Re-write this paragraph into a 90-second monologue for the baker to deliver in the movie version.

Peer-edit your monologues with your deskmate.

Assignment: Tape your monologues for presentation in the following class meeting.

**R.** Read the following authentic dialogue between two readers of *A Small, Good Thing* who discuss the visit to the bakery by Scotty's grieving parents. One reader is Romanian and the other is American. Note discrepancies between the two readers' responses and try to explain the differences.

Small group discussion: At which level of schemata (linguistic, cultural, personal schemata) has communication become confused between the two readers? Is the communication between the Romanian/American reader and the text valid?

**Romanian Reader:** What is the baker apologizing for? He is really apologizing there! *That don't explain my doing what I did, I know. But I'm deeply sorry. I'm sorry for your son, and sorry for my part in this... forgive me if you can.* I was very surprised by that! What was his part in that?

**American Reader** (laughs) He was making harassing calls to them!

**Romanian Reader:** Which harassing phone calls? He wanted to remind those people about the cake. I'm quite sure that was his intention.

**American Reader:** He kept calling them up in the middle of the night and asking them if they had forgotten about Scotty... when they walked in from the hospital after Scotty had died, and several times before. They didn't know what he was talking about! Sometimes he didn't hang up ... he tied up their line. He only said he was calling about the cakes the first time he called.

**Romanian Reader:** He meant no harm. He was working all night and he forgot what time it was. Whenever he was Scottie's cake in the bakery he simply remembered to call them again before the cake got too stale to use.

**American Reader:** No, it's not okay to call people at home from a business at 5 a.m. or at 11:30 at night.

**Romanian Reader:** I thought the woman was crazy. That she was over-excited because of her sick child and her personal suffering. I couldn't imagine why they were sitting at the bedside of their dying child talking about telephone calls ...

**American Reader:** The husband was warning her that they had a harassing caller ... because this is how the pattern unfolds repeatedly in the U.S.A. If you are forewarned it doesn't upset you nearly so much.

**Romanian Reader:** I questioned why they went to see the baker when their child had just died. I thought she was getting crazy. They both were getting crazy with suffering because he accepted to accompany her to the baker's. Why was she so angry with the baker?

**American Reader:** And not with the Doctor? He had appeared about as frequently as the harassing phone-caller. And he seems to have done them a lot more harm by actually forgetting about Scotty, or not getting around to doing anything to help Scotty.

S. Read the following definition of harassing telephone calls and the excerpt from the Wellesley College Police Department with tips on how to handle this situation. Skim the text and underline from the tips on how to best handle harassing phone calls those strategies used by Scotty's parents when they dealt with the baker's calls. Discuss how frequent such calls are in other cultures, for example in the Romanian culture.

### **Harassing Telephone Calls**

Anyone can be the victim of harassing, annoying, obscene, or threatening telephone calls. These may include random calls by pranksters, calls at hours when you are sleeping, frequent pointless calls or those where the caller says nothing, obscene calls, calls from former romantic interests, or calls where some threat is made against you, those with whom you live, or your property.

These calls are intended to upset you, either for revenge or to gratify the caller's personal urges. Most can be prevented or avoided by learning and using some simple techniques to decrease your potential for victimization.

### **How to Deal with Harassing Phone Calls**

#### **Hang up**

As soon as you hear an obscenity, improper question or no response - HANG UP! It may take the caller 5 or 6 times to get the message, but be consistent and hang up every time. They usually get tired of getting no response and stop calling. Your telephone is for your use and service; always use it on your own terms. If the caller doesn't speak or if you simply don't feel comfortable talking to the caller, *hang up*.

Remember that the telephone is under your control and you are not obligated to speak to anyone. Ask for the caller's identity or affiliation. If the caller makes an improper response or does not respond immediately, *hang up*. If a caller persists after you've made it clear you do not wish to talk, the simplest response is *to hang up*.

Other techniques that may be useful in some circumstances include *blowing a police whistle* into the phone or tapping the disconnect button and *stating "Operator, this is the call I wanted traced."*

**Don't Talk to Strangers**

Be careful when the caller says he is taking a survey. If you have any concern about the legitimacy of a person asking for personal information over the phone, ask the person for his name, firm name and telephone number. Say that you will call back after you verify the authenticity of the survey.

Don't give out any information to anyone you don't positively recognize or who fails to give satisfactory identification or affiliation. If the caller asks for your roommate or another member of your family, simply say that you'll be glad to take a message and have the call returned as promptly as possible.

Under no circumstances should you give the names of others living with you to someone who doesn't already know them. If you have children, instruct them not to talk to strangers on the telephone. Burglars or other criminals will sometimes attempt to obtain useful information from unsuspecting children. Teach your children to ask for the caller's name and number so someone can return the call later. Remember, don't speak unless you want to, don't give out any information, and don't respond to questions.

**Don't Play Detective**

Don't extend the call trying to figure out who is calling. This or any type of reaction is exactly what the caller wants. Some "silent" callers are looking for a response and may want you to become scared or angry. Don't give them the satisfaction. If the caller asks, "who is this?" or "What number have I reached," don't give an answer. Instead ask, "Whom do you want?" or "What number were you calling?" If the call is not legitimate, that will probably end it.

**Keep Cool**

Don't let the caller know you are upset or angry.

**Don't Try to Be Clever**

A witty response may well be interpreted as a sign of encouragement.

**Don't Try to Be a Counselor**

The annoyance or obscene caller certainly needs professional help, but he will only be encouraged by your concern and will continue calling.

**Tell Everyone About the Calls**

Many calls of this type are actually made by friends, family members, and even your closest friend.

**Place Ads with Caution**

When placing an ad in a newspaper or on a bulletin board, use a newspaper or post office box number if possible. If you must use your phone number, do not list your address. Crank callers are avid readers of the classified ads.

**Don't Let Your Answering Machine or Voice Mail Give You Away**

Don't say: "I'm out of the office," "I'm not at home at the present time," "I'm away for the weekend." Also refrain from using names or giving out the phone number. If the prank call is random, you've just given the caller a name and a return phone number.

Suggestions for Voice Mail Messages: "Your message is important to me, please leave your name and number"; "I'm glad you called, please leave your name and number"; "I'm not available at the present time, but I'll return your call as soon as possible".

**Report Threats of Violence or Harm Right Away**

While the vast majority of obscene and annoying phone calls are simple pranks, threats of violence must be taken seriously. Immediately after you receive a call in which there are threats of physical harm or violence report the call to the Wellesley College Police Department (x2121) or to your local police agency if you are at home or away from the campus.

If the calls persist, download and complete the log sheet to track the date and times of the calls. This log will help us investigate the incident.

## **Additional Support and Suggestions**

### **I. A. Sample memories**

Mom packing food in the kitchen. Dad finding grill in the garage. Kids running around front yard - and the car at the curb - in anticipation.

Birthday Boy putting on new present from family friends – Official Baseball Uniform of New York Yankees.

Siblings wearing long pants in summer because of poison ivy at the picnic park – Battery Kemball – and old Civil War Ammunitions storage area.

Kids fighting about who gets to ride ‘shotgun’ in the front seat of the car. Old Buick holds 7 people in backseat, two can sit ‘shotgun’ up front with dad.

Some siblings will/want to ride with family friends... their car is more modern ... has a radio.

Everybody has baseball gloves and there are several baseballs and softballs.

Cake – made by the baker – with “Happy Birthday, Charlie!” on it packed in aluminum foil – with 6 candles on top (which will keep the foil off the chocolate icing). No need to bring matches to light the candles on the cake because Jo Klein (family friend) smokes and always has at least 2 lighters in her purse or pocket.

Jo Klein also called Charlie “the birthday boy”, no one else in our family did that.

### III. C. Worksheet #3

Chronological order of quotes in the story:

1. Baker to Ann and Howard	11
2. Ann to Scotty	9
3. Franklin’s father (?) to Ann	7
4. Dr Parsons to Ann	5
5. Ann to Howard.	2
6. Howard to Ann.	6
7. First nurse to Ann	3
8. Howard to Ann	1
9. Ann to baker	12
10. Ann to Franklin’s sister (?)	8
11. Dr. Francis to Ann	4
12. Baker to Ann over phone after Scotty had died	10

**III. D.** Examine the behavior of each of the hospital staff members toward the family of the birthday boy.

Dr. Francis

*No coma ... He looked like he had just come from a concert. He’s all right, he should wake up pretty soon ... a hairline fracture of the skull. And a bit of a concussion,*

*as I said before. Of course, you know he's in shock ... No, I don't want to call it a coma. He's out of any real danger ... You try not to worry, little mother ... believe me we're doing all that can be done.*

*Dr. Francis came again in the afternoon and examined the boy once more and then left after telling them he was coming along and could wake up at any minute now.*

*Dr. Francis came in again ... looked like he had just shaved ... He ought to have been out.*

The two orderlies

*Black-haired, dark-complexioned men in white uniforms and they said a few words to each other in a foreign tongue ... Once one of the men made a comment to the other in their own language and the other man nodded slowly in response.*

Dr. Parsons

*It's perfectly normal procedure in cases like this. We just need to find out for sure why he isn't back awake yet. It's normal medical procedure and nothing to be alarmed about. We'll be taking him down in a few minutes.*

Nurse

*She nodded at them ... wrote something ... "He's stable." Doctor will be in again shortly. Doctor's back in the hospital. He's making rounds right now. She could do that (go home). I think you should both feel free to do that, if you wish."*

Lab lady

*"Without a word to them, she took blood from the boy's arm. I don't understand this, Ann said to the woman. Doctor's orders, the young woman said. I do what I'm told. They say draw that one, I draw. What's wrong with him anyway?"*

**III. H.** Express your thoughts on the universality of the death experience within families, stages of suffering, community of suffering (comment on the baker's final hospitality), how pain communicates itself, how it speaks to the others around it, how pain changes the perception of reality, how people in pain come to grips with reality, hospice and nurture of the grieving family, how pain can be alleviated, what feelings accompany the process of coping with death.

You may also choose to deal with issues of telling the truth in medical situation; malpraxis case studies; refusal of hospital staff/care givers to engage in the death in a professional way.

**III. M.** The baker compares his work to the work of a florist:

*"a necessary trade... people need to eat ... a valuable thing ... a valueless thing ... To repeat the days with the ovens endlessly full and endlessly empty."*

## FAT

**I am sitting** over coffee and cigarettes at my friend Rita's and I am telling her about it. Here is what I tell her.

It is late of a slow Wednesday when Herb seats the fat man at my station.

This fat man is the fattest person I have ever seen, though he is neat-appearing and well dressed enough. Everything about him is big. But it is the fingers I remember best. When I stop at the table near his to see to the old couple, I first notice the fingers. They look three times the size of a normal person's fingers - long, thick, creamy fingers.

I see to my other tables, a party of four businessmen, very demanding, another party of four, three men and a woman, and this old couple. Leander has poured the fat man's water, and I give the fat man plenty of time to make up his mind before going over.

Good evening, I say. May I serve you? I say.

Rita, he was big, I mean big.

Good evening, he says. Hello. Yes, he says. I think we're ready to order now, he says.

He has this way of speaking – strange, don't you know. And he makes a little puffing sound every so often.

I think we will begin with a Caesar salad, he says. And then a bowl of soup with some extra bread and butter, if you please. The lamb chops, I believe, he says. And baked potato with sour cream. We'll see about dessert later. Thank you very much, he says, and hands me the menu.

God, Rita, but those were fingers.

I hurry away to the kitchen and turn in the order to Rudy, who takes it with a face. You know Rudy. Rudy is that way when he works.

As I come out of the kitchen, Margo – I've told you about Margo? The one who chases Rudy? Margo says to me, Who's your fat friend? He's really a fatty.

**Now that's** part of it. I think that is really part of it.

I make the Caesar salad there at his table, him watching my every move, meanwhile buttering pieces of bread and laying them off to one side, all the time making this puffing noise. Anyway, I am so keyed up or something, I knock over his glass of water.

I'm sorry, I say. It always happens when you get into a hurry. I'm very sorry, I say. Are you all right? I'll get the boy to clean up right away, I say.

It's nothing, he says. It's all right, he says, and he puffs. Don't worry about it, we don't mind, he says. He smiles and waves as I go off to get Leander, and when I come back to serve the salad, I see the fat man has eaten all his bread and butter.

A little later, when I bring him more bread, he has finished his salad. You know the size of those Caesar salads?

You're very kind, he says. This bread is marvelous, he says.

Thank you, I say.

Well, it is very good, he says, and we mean what. We don't enjoy bread like this, he says. Where are you from? I ask him. I don't believe I've seen you before, I say.

He's not the kind of person you'd forget, Rita puts in with a snicker.

Denver, he says.

I don't say anything more on the subject, though I am curious.

Your soup will be along in a few minutes, sir, I say, and I go off to put the finishing touches to my party of four businessmen, very demanding.

When I serve his soup, I see the bread has disappeared again. He is just putting the last piece of bread into his mouth.

Believe me, he says, we don't eat like this all the time, he says. And puffs. You'll have to excuse us, he says.

Don't think a thing about it, please, I say. I like to see a man eat and enjoy himself, I say.

I don't know, he says. I guess that's what you'd call it. And puffs. He arranges the napkin. Then he picks up his spoon.

God, he's fat! says Leander.

He can't help it, I say, so shut up.

I put down another basket of bread and more butter. How was the soup? I say.

Thank you. Good, he says. Very good, he says. He wipes his lips and dabs his chin. Do you think it's warm in here, or is it just me? he says.

No, it is warm in here, I say.

Maybe we'll take off our coat, he says.

Go right ahead, I say. A person has to be comfortable, I say.

That's true, he says, that is very, very true, he says.

But I see a little later that he is still wearing his coat.

My large parties are gone now and also the old couple. The place is emptying out. By the time I serve the fat man his chops and baked potato, along with more bread and butter, he is the only one left.

I drop lots of sour cream onto his potato. I sprinkle bacon and chives over his sour cream. I bring him more bread and butter.

Is everything all right? I say.

Fine, he says, and he puffs. Excellent, thank you, he says, and puffs again.

Enjoy your dinner, I say. I raise the lid of his sugar bowl and look in. He nods and keeps looking at me until I move away.

I know now I was after something. But I don't know what.

How is old tub-of-guts doing? He's going to run your legs off, says Harriet. You know Harriet.

For dessert, I say to the fat man, there is the Green Lantern Special, which is a pudding cake with sauce, or there is cheesecake or vanilla ice cream or pineapple sherbet.

We're not making you late, are we? he says, puffing and looking concerned.

Not at all, I say. Of course not, I say. Take your time, I say. I'll bring you more coffee while you make up your mind.

We'll be honest with you, he says. And he moves in the seat. We would like the Special, but we may have a dish of vanilla ice cream as well. With just a drop of chocolate syrup, if you please. We told you we were hungry, he says.

I go off to the kitchen to see after his dessert myself, and Rudy says, Harriet says you got a fat man from the circus out there. That true?

Rudy has his apron and hat off now, if you see what I mean.

Rudy, he is fat, I say, but that is not the whole story.

Rudy just laughs.

Sounds to me like she's sweet on fat-stuff, he says.

Better watch out, Rudy, says Joanne, who just that minute comes into the kitchen.

I'm getting jealous, Rudy says to Joanne.

I put the Special in front of the fat man and a big bowl of vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup to the side.

Thank you, he says.

You are very welcome, I say - and a feeling comes over me.

Believe it or not, he says, we have not always eaten like this.

Me, I eat and I eat and I can't gain, I say. I'd like to gain, I say.

No, he says. If we had our choice, no. But there is no choice.

Then he picks up his spoon and eats.

What else? Rita says, lighting one of my cigarettes and pulling her chair to the table. This story's getting interesting now, Rita says.

That's it. Nothing else. He eats his desserts, and then he leaves and then we go home, Rudy and me.

Some fatty, Rudy says, stretching like he does when he's tired. Then he just laughs and goes back to watching the TV.

I put the water on to boil for tea and take a shower. I put my hand on my middle and wonder what would happen if I had children and one of them turned out to look like that, so fat.

I pour the water in the pot, arrange the cups, the sugar bowl, carton of half and half, and take the tray in to Rudy.

As if he's been thinking about it, Rudy says, I knew a fat guy once, a couple of fat guys, really fat guys, when I was a kid. They were tubbies, my God. Don't remember their names. Fat, that's the only name this one kid had. We called him Fat, the kid who lived next door to me. He was a neighbor. The other kid came along later. His name was Wobbly. Everybody called him Wobbly except the teachers. Wobbly and Fat. Wish I had their pictures, Rudy says.

I can't think of anything to say, so we drink our tea and pretty soon I get up to go to bed.

Rudy gets up too, turns off the TV, locks the front door, and begins his unbuttoning.

I get into the bed and move clear over to the edge and lie there on my stomach. But right away, as soon as he turns off the light and gets into bed, Rudy begins. I turn on my back and relax some, though it is against my will. But here is the thing. When he gets on me, I suddenly feel I am fat. I feel I am terrifically fat, so fat that Rudy is a tiny thing and hardly there at all.

That's a funny story. Rita says, but I can see she doesn't know what to make of it.

I feel depressed. But I won't go into it with her. I've already told her too much.

She sits there waiting, her dainty fingers poking her hair.

*Waiting for what?* I'd like to know.

It is August.

My life is going to change. I feel it.

## NOTES ON *FAT*

### **I. Pre-Reading**

**A.** Think of your life habits. Do you find them healthy? What kind of routines do you fight to get rid of, if any: overeating, smoking, gambling, etc.? Discuss with your group and make an inventory of compulsive behaviors characteristic of your peers. Jot down strategies used by other discussion partners for fighting their own bad habits.

**B.** Have you ever been worried about your eating habits? Find partners in your group of discussion who are also concerned about their weight. Negotiate together a way to control your attitude about food until, at least, the next English class, and write the rules to follow by everybody who wants to be part of this consensus. For example, promise to stick on your mirror, computer, and your shelves the following “Balance your food intake and your daily activity”. Honestly jot down all breaches.

In the following class, comment in your group on the problems you encountered when you broke your promise to yourself. At home free write about the feelings you experienced while being part of a support group trying to control the same problem.

### **Balance Your Food Intake and Your Activity**

One small chocolate chip cookie (50 calories) is equivalent to walking briskly for 10 minutes.

The difference between a large gourmet chocolate chip cookie and a small chocolate chip cookie could be about 40 minutes of raking leaves (200 calories).

One hour of walking at moderate pace (20 min/mile) uses about the same amount of energy that is in one jelly filled doughnut (300 calories).

A fast food meal containing a double patty cheeseburger, extra-large fries and a 24 oz. soft drink is equal to running 2½ hours at a 10 min/mile pace (1500 calories).

C. Read the information below about Overeaters Anonymous (OA). This was downloaded from the Internet. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation about OA for the next meeting of the youth club you are a member of.

### **The Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous**

The Twelve Steps are the heart of the OA recovery program. They offer a new way of life that enables the compulsive overeater to live without the need for excess food. The ideas expressed in the Twelve Steps, which originated in Alcoholics Anonymous, reflect practical experience and application of spiritual insights recorded by thinkers throughout the ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work! They enable compulsive overeaters and millions of other Twelve-Steppers to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which OA is built.

1. We admitted we were powerless over food - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.

For an in-depth study of the Twelve Steps, read “The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous”, available from the online literature catalog.

Overeaters Anonymous offers a program of recovery from compulsive overeating using the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of OA. Worldwide meetings and other tools provide a fellowship of experience, strength and hope where members respect one another's anonymity. OA charges no dues or fees; it is self-supporting through member contributions. Unlike other organizations, OA is not just about weight loss, obesity or diets; it addresses physical, emotional and spiritual well being. It is not a religious organization and does not promote any particular diet. To address weight loss, OA encourages members to develop a food plan with a health care professional and a sponsor. If you want to stop your compulsive eating, welcome to Overeaters Anonymous.

**D.** Read the following text about how to keep oneself physically active. Talk about the physical exercises each of you practice weekly. Comment critically about your past and present practices. Identify one or two persons from your discussion group who are willing to make a team with you for a scheduled physical exercise all of you might find suitable, necessary, and also enjoyable. Write together a timetable for it.

**Overweight and Obesity: What You Can Do**  
Being Physically Active Can Help  
You Attain or Maintain a Healthy Weight

**OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY**

61% of adults in the United States were overweight or obese in 1999.

Approximately 300,000 deaths each year in the United States may be attributable to obesity.

Overweight and obesity are associated with heart disease, certain types of cancer, type 2 diabetes, stroke, arthritis, breathing problems, and psychological disorders, such as depression.

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: WEIGHT CONTROL AND OTHER BENEFITS**

Physical activity contributes to weight loss, especially when it is combined with calorie reduction.

Regular physical activity is extremely helpful for the prevention of overweight and obesity.

Regular physical activity is very important in maintaining weight loss.

In addition to weight control, physical activity helps prevent heart disease, helps control cholesterol levels and diabetes, slows bone loss associated with advancing age, lowers the risk of certain cancers, and helps reduce anxiety and depression.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Many people live sedentary lives; in fact, 40% of adults in the United States do not participate in any leisure-time physical activity.

Less than 1/3 of adults engage in the recommended amounts of physical activity (at least 30 minutes most days).

## YOU CAN ACTIVATE YOURSELF

You don't need special skills or training to be physically active. Walking is a great way to be active.

Physical activity should be initiated slowly, and the intensity should be increased gradually (e.g., start with a 10-minute walk three times a week and work your way up to 30 minutes of brisk walking or other form of moderate activity five times a week).

Activities can be split into several short periods (e.g., 10 minutes 3 times a day) instead of one longer period (e.g., 30 minutes once a day).

You should select activities that you ENJOY and can fit into your daily life.

It may take time to incorporate more activity into your daily life. Don't get discouraged if at first you miss a day or two; just keep trying and do your best to make it a regular part of your life. You will soon realize how good it feels to be physically active and fit.

Ask for support from friends and family; likewise, support the people in your life who are trying to be physically active.

Many forms of physical activity can be social, allowing you to converse and spend time with family or friends or to develop new relationships.

Make fitness a priority ... COMMIT TO IT.

Consult with your health care provider before starting a vigorous exercise program if you have ever had heart trouble or high blood pressure or suffer from chest pains, dizziness or fainting, arthritis, or if you are over age 40 (men) or 50 (women).

To maintain your weight, your intake of calories must equal your energy output.

To lose weight, you must use more energy than you take in.

A difference of one 12-oz. soda (150 calories) or 30 minutes of brisk walking most days can add or subtract approximately 10 pounds to your weight each year.

**TILT THE BALANCE WITH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Adding moderate amounts of physical activity five or more times a week to your routine uses 150 calories of energy on each day of activity, which can be equivalent to approximately 5 pounds in 6 months or 10 pounds in 1 year.

You can choose any combination of type of activity at the length of time specified from the following table to burn approximately 150 calories.

Reducing your calorie intake by 150 calories a day, along with participating in moderate activity, could double your weight loss and is equivalent to approximately 10 pounds in 6 months and 20 pounds in one year.

<b>Examples of moderate amounts of physical activity</b>		
<p><b>Common Chores</b>                      Washing and waxing a car for 45-60 min                      Washing windows or floors for 45-60 min                      Gardening for 30-45 min                      Wheeling self in wheelchair 30-40 min                      Pushing a stroller 1½ miles in 30 min                      Raking leaves for 30 min                      Walking 2 miles in 30 min (15min/mile)                      Shoveling snow for 15 min                      Stairwalking for 15 min</p>	<p><b>Sporting Activities</b>                      Playing volleyball for 45-60 min                      Playing touch football for 45 min                      Walking 1¾ miles in 35 min (20min/mile)                      Basketball (shooting baskets) 30 min                      Bicycling 5 miles in 30 min                      Dancing fast (social) for 30 min                      Water aerobics for 30 min                      Swimming laps for 20 min                      Basketball (playing) for 15-20 min                      Bicycling 4 miles in 15 min                      Jumping rope for 15 min                      Running 1½ miles in 15 min. (10min/mile)</p>	<p><b>Less Vigorous, More Time</b></p>  <p><b>More Vigorous, Less Time</b></p>

**E.** Read the following text prepared by the White House web site. Search the Internet for similar information about the Romanian governmental policy concerning healthy eating habits to be encouraged officially for the Romanians by the current Government. Share this information with your parents or your grandparents. Ask them about the ‘healthy eating’ propaganda of the late seventies and eighties in Romania under Ceausescu. Compare and contrast the aims of the communist policy with those of the present times in your personal journal.

#### **HEALTHY U.S.**

If you just look at the numbers, it can be overwhelming. Obesity is epidemic in the United States. In recent years, diabetes rates among people aged 30 to 39 rose by 70%. About 46.5 million adults in the United States smoke cigarettes, even though this single behavior will result in disability and premature death for half of them. More than 60% of American adults do not get enough physical activity, and more than 25% are not active at all. Yet if you talk to Americans, there is hope. They say they generally know what will make them healthier, but they are confused about what specific information is credible and accurate. HealthierUS.gov will be that source of credible, accurate information to help Americans choose to live healthier lives.

<b>Physical Fitness</b> <b>Be physically active each day</b> Learn how to make regular physical activity a routine part of your life.	<b>Prevention</b> <b>Get preventive screening</b> Find out how screening can protect you and your family from illnesses YOU can prevent.
<b>Nutrition</b> <b>Eat a nutritious diet</b> Healthy eating is not a fad-it's a lifestyle. Learn what the experts say you need for a healthy diet	<b>Make Healthy Choices</b> <b>Avoid risky behaviors</b> Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. If you smoke, you can quit. If you don't smoke, don't start!

More information about the President's *HealthierU.S.* Initiative is available on the White House Web site. Check out these additional government health sites:

**[Fitness.gov](#)** - Run by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, this site updates the public on the Council's fitness promotion activities and serves as a comprehensive resource for organizations and individuals wishing to take part in the Council's awards programs. Here you can also view [Council members' bios](#).

**[BAM.gov](#)** - Based on two years of market research and development with teachers, students, scientists, and communications professionals, this Body and Mind (BAM) site is an interactive tool for adolescents, providing up-to-date information and encouragement to increase their level of physical activity and establish fitness habits that will stay with them for life.

**[VERB](#)** - This interactive Web site provides kids with ideas on how to become physically active and is part of an overall youth media campaign by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**[Recreation.gov](#)** - A partnership among Federal land management agencies to provide an easy-to-use web site with information about all federal recreation areas. The site allows you to search for recreation areas by state, by recreational activity, by agency, or by map.

**[healthfinder.gov](#)** - healthfinder® is a free guide to reliable consumer health information, developed by the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal agencies. This site links to carefully selected information and Web sites from over 1,700 health-related government agencies and not-for-profit organizations, includes many online checkups, and offers daily health news in English and Spanish.

**[4woman.gov](#)** - The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) is a service of the Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health. The NWHIC Web site at [4woman.gov](#) provides a gateway to women's health information resources developed by the Department of Health and Human Services, other Federal agencies, and private sector resources and covers over 800 topics.

**[Nutrition.gov](#)** - This site provides easily accessible government information on nutrition, healthy eating, and food safety. Providing accurate scientific information on nutrition and dietary guidance is critical to the public's ability to make the right choices in the effort to curb obesity and other food related diseases.

## II. While-Reading

**A.** Describe what you think or feel as you read Carver's short-story *Fat*. Jot down words, phrases, and ideas that you spontaneously produce while reading.

**B.** Read Student 1's notes made while reading *Fat*. Use them as a model to help you explore what you like or what interests you most in the story, what you did not like, what you found confusing or significant. While you free write during your second reading of the text, you are encouraged to raise as many questions as possible addressed to yourself or to your discussion group.

### Student 1:

*I liked the way she named all the names of the characters. It made me like her.  
I liked her way of serving him, anticipating, giving time, responding, asking, etc. None too much.*

*I was interested in his "papal 'we'" ... and the fact that he fell in and out of it.  
That he did not take his jacket off and she noticed it... perhaps he was making a pass?  
That everybody else commented on his fat.*

*That she was telling Rita.*

*"that was part of it" ... What does 'it' mean? I have to re-read to clarify this...*

**C.** Choose from the questions written down in the previous exercise those starting with *why* and write them on cards which you hand over to the teacher. Your small

group receives a number of questions distributed by the teacher from other students.

Discuss possible answers to those questions in your group. Report your group answers to the whole class.

### III. Post-Reading

A. Read Student 2's free writing dairy entry about *Fat*. Free write your own entry and give your personal interpretation of what 'it' could mean.

#### Student 2:

*I think the story is one of atmosphere. I also think there is more in it than what it seems at first glance. It is a seemingly uninteresting meeting between a client and his waitress in a coffee shop. One may think it is about what good service and hospitality mean...because the waitress is extremely nice and welcoming, almost reading the client's mind ... or it may be that the narrator wants to raise the issue of obese people in consumerism-oriented societies...or that for 'normal' people, it is difficult to understand what abnormality means. But perhaps there is also a hidden meaning, something about unconditioned love, annunciation of a new birth or of a change? What else could be the implication of the circle-like construction of the short story, which starts with the waitress saying "I am telling Rita about it? Here is what I tell her" and finishes with: "That's a funny story, Rita says, but I can see she doesn't know what to make of it. I feel depressed. But I won't go into it with her. I've already told her too much." What does "it" represent? Anyway more than what is being clearly stated in the words carefully chosen by the narrator ...*

**B.** Write notes about the main characters, the waitress and the client. Re-read the text and write each statement or word that you find significant in the text on a separate card. Rank these cards in order of importance to illustrate your interpretation of the character and implicitly of the story. Explain your choices to your group.

**C.** Jot down the summary of *Fat*.

**D.** Small-group discussion: Listen to the summaries produced by the members of your group. Try to identify which of the diverse readings/predictions you listened to have transformed your understanding of the text. Jot down those ideas that throw a new light on the text.

**E.** Rewrite your summary to accommodate useful ideas from your partners' summaries.

**F.** Student 3 has linked her reading of *Fat* to an Emily Dickinson poem. Can you see a reason for that? Link your own background experience or a parallel text to Carver's story. Share your thoughts in your discussion group.

*I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
 Are you-Nobody-too?  
 Then there's a pair of us!  
 Don't tell! They'd banish us-you know!*

*How dreary-to be-Somebody!  
 How public- like a Frog-  
 To tell your name-the livelong June-  
 To an admiring Bog!*

Emily Dickinson #288, The Essential Dickinson, selected by Joyce Carol Oates, NJ, Hopewell: The Ecco Press

**G.** Read the following interview taken by Studs Terkel to the waitress Dolores

Dante in his book *Working*. While reading, keep track of all the people she has to be aware of during her working time. Try to find an explanation as to why this hypersensitivity to the people around is necessary and write down your thoughts.

I have to be a waitress. How else can I learn about people? How else does the world come to me? I can't go to everyone. So they have to come to me. Everyone wants to eat; everyone has hunger. And I deserve them if they've had a bad day. I nurse them and cajole them. Maybe with coffee I give them a little philosophy. They have cocktails; I give them political science. People imagine a waitress couldn't possibly think or have any kind of aspiration other than to serve food. When somebody says to me, "You're great, how come you're JUST a waitress?" JUST a waitress," I'd say, "Why don't you think you deserve to be served by me?" It's implying that he's not worthy, not that I'm not worthy. It makes me irate. I don't feel lowly at all. I myself feel sure I don't want to change the job. I love it. Tips? I feel like Carmen. It's like a gypsy holding out a tambourine, and they throw the coin. (Laughs.) If you like people, you're not thinking of the tips. I never count my money at night. I always wait till morning. If I thought about my tips, I'd be uptight. I never look at a tip. You pick it up quickly. I would do my bookkeeping in the morning. It would be very dull for me to know I was making so much and no more. I do like the challenge. And it isn't demeaning, not for me. ... And I don't have a high opinion of bosses. The more popular you are, the more the boss holds it over your head. You're bringing them business, but he knows you're getting good tips and you won't leave. You have to worry not to overplay it, because the boss becomes resentful, and he uses this as a club over your head. If you become too good of a waitress, there's jealousy. They don't come in and say, "Where's the boss?" They'll ask for Dolores. It doesn't make a hit. That makes it rough. Sometimes you say, Aw hell, why am I trying so hard? I did get an ulcer.

Maybe the things I kept too myself were twisting me. It's not the customers, never the customers. It's injustice ... My dad came from Italy and I think of his broken English - injoost. He hated injustice. If you hate injustice for the world, you hate more than anything injustice toward you. Loyalty is never appreciated, particularly if you're the type who doesn't like small talk and are not the type who makes reports on your fellow worker. The boss wants to find out what is going on surreptitiously. In our society today you have informers everywhere. They've informed on cooks, on co-workers. "O someone wasted this'... See if she wrote that on her check.' The salad looked like it was a double salad." I don't give anything away. I just give myself. Informers will manufacture things in order to make their job worthwhile. They're not sure of themselves as workers. There's always someone who wants your station, who would be a pretender to the crown. In life there is always someone who wants somebody's job. I'd get intoxicated by giving service.

People would ask for me, and I didn't have enough tables. Some of the girls are standing and don't have customers. There is resentment. I feel self-conscious. I feel a sense of guilt. It cramps my style. I would like to say to the customer, "Go to so-and-so." But you can't do that, because you feel a sense of loyalty. So you would rush, get to your customers quickly. Some don't care to drink and still they wait for you. That's a compliment. There is plenty of tension. If the cook isn't good, you fight to see that the customers get what you know they like. You have to use diplomacy with cooks, who are always dangerous. (Laughs.) They're madmen. (Laughs) You have to be their friend. They better like you. And your bartender better like you too, because he may do something to the drink. If your bartender doesn't like you, your cook doesn't like you, your boss doesn't like you and the other girls don't like you, you're in trouble.

It's tiring, it's nerve-racking. We don't ever sit down. We're on stage and the bosses are watching. If you get the wrong shoes and you get the wrong stitch in that shoe, that does bother you. Your feet hurt, your body aches. If you come out in anger at things that were done to you it would only make you feel cheapened. Really I've been keeping it to myself. But of late, I'm beginning to spew it out. It's almost as though I sensed my body and soul had had quite enough. It builds and builds and builds in your guts. Near crying. I can't think about it... (She cries softly.) 'Cause you're tired. When the night is done, you're tired. You've had so much, there's so much going... You had to get it done. The dread that something wouldn't be right, because you want to please ... You hope everyone is satisfied. the night's done, you've done your act, the curtains close. The next morning is pleasant again. I take out my budget book, write down how much I made, what my bills are. I'm managing. I won't give up this job as long as I'm able to do it. I feel out of contact if I just sit at home. At work they all consider me a gook. (Laughs.) That's okay. No matter where I'd be, I would make a rough road for me. It's just me, and I can't keep still. It hurts, and what hurts has to come out.

POSTSCRIPT: "After 16 years - that was seven years ago - I took a trip to Hawaii and the Caribbean for two weeks. Went with a lover. The kids saw it - they're all married now. (Laughs.) One of my daughters said, "Act your age." I said, "Honey, if I were acting my age, I wouldn't be walking. My bones would ache. You don't want to hear about my arthritis. Aren't you glad?"

**H.** Compare the waitress in Carver's *Fat* with the waitress interviewed by Terkel. Jot down the feelings you might have in common for both of them. Compare your notes to what Student 4 wrote on this issue.

**Student 4:**

*What I loved about Fat was how the waitress discussed all the people in her environment, i.e. the cafe. I think I counted 15 people she mentioned in all. This waitress does the same, enumerating cooks, other waitresses, the bosses, the customers, etc. She has to be aware of ... is aware of everybody around her, isn't she?... the Terkel interview provides a 'why' this hyper-sensitivity is necessary... it makes me care about the waitress ... I still think she has run off to Denver to marry the baker from the other story, and what's her name is now living with the cook.*

**J.** What do you know about Terkel Studs, the author of the interview in exercise **G.?** Go to a search engine on the Internet and find information about Terkel to complete what is given below. Present this information to your discussion group.

Terkel Studs had a radio show in Chicago and interviewed the little man ... started a collection of job site interviews which turned into the *bookWorking*. It is often presented in dramatic form on college campuses and community theatres. One hundred interviews in all.

**K.** Assuming that Carver's *Fat* speaks symbolically about the demystification of the Annunciation (with the spiritual fertilization of the woman, as a generic Virgin Mary, by the visitation of the Holy Spirit in the shape of a kind giant), read the text again and jot down words and phrases that might support such a reading.

L. Read the following excerpt from *The New Testament, Luke: 'Annunciation of the Savior'*. Improvise and role play this scene using a present-day style of speaking, personal and less predictable ways of addressing your interlocutor. Try to include in your script words and phrases relevant for the interpretation of the text suggested in exercise J. above.

### **Annunciation of the Savior**

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And when the angel had come to her, he said, "*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women.*" When she had heard him she was troubled at his word, and kept pondering what manner of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*"

But Mary said to the angel, "*How shall this happen, since I do not know of man?*"

And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth thy kinswoman also has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month; for nothing shall be impossible with God.*"

But Mary said, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.*" And the angel departed from her.

**M.** In small groups brainstorm about classic text on the issue of the *Annunciation*. Read the opening chapters of the works of the evangelists Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke. Which of these has the best known *Annunciation* story?

**N.** Read chapter 1 from *Luke* (below). Identify the main story lines and jot down possible intersection points with Carver's *Fat*. Use Student 5's notes from the personal blog open to friends as a model for your own notes.

**Student 5:**

*VERY IMPORTANT to remember... to distinguish between the Immaculate conception - which took place in the soul of Mary while Mary was still in the womb of Anna. and the Annunciation symbolism which I think Carver hints at in his Fat... The lord saw Mary and decided she was the one to bear the Word of God... so she was conceived WITHOUT ORIGINAL SIN - or the mark of Adam - on her soul... thus the Immaculata - or the one who was conceived without original sin on her soul. This idea of the Immaculate Conception - has nothing to do directly with Jesus and what is referred to as The Virgin Birth of Jesus ... that is, that he was conceived without Mary having had sexual relations with any man ... rather the Holy Spirit - that dove who's always in the Annunciation pictures - infused life into her, etc. This concept, the (Immaculate Conception) has nothing to do with the Carver story.*

*It is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT that I do not mix up these two concepts, because any reader who is Catholic-Christian (and most of them have had the difference hammered into their heads in catechism class from the age of 12, whereas I - as an Orthodox brought up in the communist age- have not received any formal religious education) will dismiss my whole analogy to the ANNUNCIATION to Mary by the Angel Gabriel that she would be the mother of the Lord if they think the text is confused about this basic distinction.*

*Keep the Immaculate (soul of Mary) Conception (in the womb of Anna) out of the picture and FAR AWAY from the subject of the Annunciation which I find SO relevant for Carver's story.*

*The Annunciation story is best told in Luke, Ch 1 v. 26-38... But PLEASE read all of Chapter 1. This is how you get the other story of the cousin Elizabeth being pregnant*

*with John the Baptist, and also the VISITATION story of Mary visiting Elizabeth. I read this text out loud in the hotel in Florence to a friend and found that no one on this earth can be considered fully educated until they have read the first chapter of Luke (witness how the Artists of Florence revered the story) I and my friend brainstormed some of the symbolism of the Annunciation from the Italian great pictures... check out the Leonardo book that I bought - that's the classic, often there are three fingers raised (Gabriel) in the paintings... Carver mentions a three finger width which outside the Gabriel context seems phallic. A good deal of the talk with Rita is possibly parallels to the talk with Elizabeth in Luke. You mentioned the sexual/spiritual impregnation of the female. Man's use of I/we personal and papal, which is how I feel about Gabriel, and the artists do too... see the little nativity book I sent you years ago – cartoon style Gabriel is still personal/papal. Go ahead with it. You made the connection, not me. I was stunned by the association, but could see it immediately when you mentioned it.*

### **From Luke, chapter 1**

#### ***The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold***

5. In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.
6. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.
7. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.
8. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, she was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
10. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.
11. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.
12. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

13. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

14. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

15. for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

16. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.

17. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18. Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19. The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

20. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

21. Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

22. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23. When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

24. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

25. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

***The Birth of Jesus Foretold***

26. In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,

27. to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

28. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

31. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

32. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,

33. and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34. "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35. The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

36. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

37. For nothing is impossible with God."

38. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

***Mary Visits Elizabeth***

39. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,

40. where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

41. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

43. But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44. As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

45. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

### ***Mary's Song***

46. And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord

47. and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48. for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49. for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name.

50. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

51. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

53. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

54. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

55. to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.

56. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

## LITTLE THINGS

**Early that** day the weather turned and the snow was melting into dirty water. Streaks of it ran down from the little shoulder-high window that faced the backyard. Cars slushed by on the street outside where it was getting dark. But it was getting dark on the inside too. He was in the bedroom pushing clothes into a suitcase when she came to the door. I'm glad you're leaving! I'm glad you're leaving! she said. Do you hear? He kept on putting his things into the suitcase. Son of a bitch! I'm so glad you're leaving! She began to cry. You can't even look me in the face, can you? Then she noticed the baby's picture on the bed and picked it up. He looked at her and she wiped her eyes and stared at him before turning and going back to the living room. Bring that back, he said. Just get your things and get out, she said. He did not answer. He fastened the suitcase, put on his coat, looked around the bedroom before turning off the light. Then he went out to the living room. She stood in the doorway of the little kitchen holding the baby. I want the baby, he said. Are you crazy? No, but I want the baby. I'll get someone to come by for his things. You're not touching this baby, she said. The baby had begun to cry and she uncovered the blanket from around his head. Oh, oh, she said, looking at the baby. He moved toward her. For God's sake! she said. She took a step back into the kitchen. I want the baby. Get out of here! She turned and tried to hold the baby over in a corner behind the stove. But he came up. He reached across the stove and tightened his hands on the baby. Let go of him, he said. Get away, get away! She cried. The baby was red-faced and screaming. In the scuffle they knocked down a flowerpot that hung behind the stove. He crowded her into the wall then, trying to break her grip. He held on to the baby and pushed with all his weight. Let go of him, he said. Don't, she said. You're hurting the baby, she said. I'm not hurting the baby, he said. The kitchen window gave no light. In the near-dark he worked on her fisted fingers with one hand and with the other hand he gripped the screaming baby up under an arm near the shoulder. She felt her fingers being forced open. She felt the baby going from her. No! she screamed just as her hands came loose. She would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby's other arm. She caught the baby around the wrist and leaned back.

But he would not let go. He felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard.

In this manner, the issue was decided.

## NOTES ON *LITTLE THINGS*

### I. Pre-Reading

#### A. Writing

Remember when you had to face a moment of crisis, where you were an actor or an onlooker. After you have identified this moment, write 200 words about this experience. You may reflect on the potential for a crisis to either escalate aggressive behavior or to alleviate accumulated tension. Use the following questions as prompts for organizing your thoughts:

- How do people behave in moments of crisis? How did the crisis build up? Were there stages to the crisis? Did they build up slowly, was there a climax, was there a denouement?
- How did the language, the body language, the silence or the behavior reflect the crisis?

- Are these moments moments of truth or moments of dislocation of the personality? Do the monstrous reactions people sometimes have to a crisis spring from elements of their personality? Are their responses provoked by circumstances outside? Or is it a bit of both?

**B. Discussion:** In small groups share ideas from your reflective writing on crisis.

**C. Small-Group Activity:** Skim and scan the *Old Testament* to find the story of *The Judgement of Solomon*. (one copy of the Old Testament for each group)

1. Skim the table of contents of the *Old Testament* for each book that might contain the story of the *Judgement of Solomon*.

Hints: Solomon was the son of King David, the same David who slew the giant, Goliath, with a slingshot. Solomon was first a Judge. Solomon was later the King.

2. Scan the Books of the *Old Testament* which might contain the story of the *Judgement of Solomon* regarding the two women who were fighting for the one live baby.
3. Enter the book, chapter and verses for the *Judgement of Solomon*.

D. Read the following chapter in which the story of the *Judgement of Solomon* is found.

1. And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.
2. Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days.
3. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.
4. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there: for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.
5. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.
6. and Solomon said, thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.
7. and now, O LORD my God, thou hast make thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.
8. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people who thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.
9. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?
10. And the speech pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.
11. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies: but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment:
12. Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart: so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.
13. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.
14. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.
15. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings and made a feast to all his servants.
16. Then came there two women that were harlots, unto the king and stood before him.

17. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house: and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.

18. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.

19. And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it.

20. And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.

21. And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.

22. But the other woman said, No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours. The first said, No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine. So they argued before the king.

23. Then the king said, The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; while the other says, 'Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.' 24. So the king said, Bring me a sword, and they brought a sword before the king. 25. The king said, Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.

26. But the woman whose son was alive said to the king--because compassion for her son burned within her--Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him! The other said, It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.

27. Then the king responded: Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.

28. All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of the Lords in him, to execute justice.

**E.** Outline the chapter of the *Old Testament* in which you found the *Judgement of Solomon*. Use the model outline given below. You have 15 minutes to write your personal reflections regarding the Judgement of Solomon. You may consider situations in today's society in which the conflicts similar to that in the *Judgement of Solomon* are enacted. Describe how one of these situations has affected legislation in Romania, behavior in your culture, or feelings in your own family.

## Sample Outline

### I. DREAM (Gibeon) (v.5)

ASK and you shall receive (v. 5)

GIVE me an understanding heart with which to judge thy people (v. 9)

### II. JUDGEMENT (Jerusalem) (v. 15 & 16)

2 women claim live baby (v.21 & 22)

Solomon says “divide the living child in two” (v. 25)

1st woman says “Yes, that’s fair” (v. 26)

2nd woman says “No, spare the child, give it to her” (v. 26)

Solomon says “Give the child to the 2nd woman. She is the mother thereof (v. 27)

### III. FAME of SOLOMON (all of Israel)

People heard, people respected/feared his wisdom and judgement (v. 27)

**F.** In small groups, compare notes on this journal entry for another fifteen minutes.

**G.** Read the following excerpt from the *Judgement of Solomon*. In small groups discuss the philosophy practiced by Solomon. Reflect on possible connections with your own life choices.

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask and I shall give thee and Solomon said ... I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people who thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great people. And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

## H. Homework Assignment

Focus on Solomon's response (above) when the Lord offers him the fulfillment of a wish. Then read Carver's choice of opening quote to his short story collection, *Where I'm Calling From* (below) and write a 5-paragraph contrastive essay relating these two texts. Use the prompts on writing contrastive essays as well as the sample contrastive analysis. In your essay discuss these two philosophies about knowing what to want.

*We can never know what to want,  
because, living only one life, we can neither  
compare it with our previous lives,  
nor perfect it in our lives to come.*

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

### Writing a 5-paragraph contrastive essay

First, make a list or a semantic map of the qualities, advantages, etc of each of the items to be compared.

Second, decide for yourself what point of view you will write your essay from (strongly in favor of one side or the other, aware of advantages and disadvantages of both, etc.).

Third, arrange arguments in relative and logical order for both items or ideas to be contrasted.

Fourth, begin to write:

Paragraph one contains the thesis statement and other background information.

Paragraph two and three contain at least two arguments about/in favor of one item/idea.

Paragraph three and four contain at least two (related) arguments about/in favor of the other item/idea.

Paragraph five contains a conclusion statement and other sentences which round out the arguments of the body paragraphs and which refer to some degree back to the thesis statement.

### Sample Contrastive Essay

Kundera writes in Eastern Europe at the same time Carver is writing in the United States. They are cultural reflections of peoples neither knowing how to act nor having faith in the effect of good actions or clear thinking. Solomon, on the other hand, firm in his faith in the Lord, believes in and pursues wisdom as a quality with which he can effect the life of his tribe and perhaps the course of its history. I am respectful of both attitudes, having seen evidence that in the twentieth century there is ...

**J.** Peer edit your essay with your writing partner in the following class.

**K.** Small-Group Activity: Discuss the two philosophies analyzed in your essays.

Generate questions, related themes, etc. Introduce to your group other texts you have read which contain allusions to this Biblical text, i.e. Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (see below). You can find other examples by using Google, AltaVista or other search engines on the Internet.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a parable inspired by the Chinese play Chalk Circle. Written at the close of World War II, the story is set in the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia. It retells the tale of King Solomon and a child claimed by and fought over by two mothers. But this chalk circle is metaphorically drawn around a society misdirected in its priorities. Brecht's statements about class are cloaked in the innocence of a fable that whispers insistently to the audience.

<google, Caucasian Chalk Circle>

## II. While-Reading

A. Read Carver's *Small Things* in class.

B. Annotate, while reading, those things that you think are significant or which you do not fully understand.

## III. Post-Reading

A. Write down what you understand from Carver's final sentence '*In this manner the issue was decided.*' Then look up in the dictionary and write down the different meanings of the word *issue*. Have you found an unexpected connection between the content of the story and one of the meanings of the word *issue*?

B. Outline the text. Justify your choices for outline structure. Take as a model the following type of outline.

**Sample Outline Text**

(using locations in the apartment as indicators of sections of the text structure)

**1. BEDROOM**

Man packing luggage

Verbal fight about baby picture

*I'm glad you're leaving (x 3)*

*She began to cry*

**2. DOOR TO KITCHEN**

Verbal fight about baby (who had begun to cry)

*I want the baby*

*Are you crazy?*

**3. KITCHEN CORNER BY THE STOVE**

Physical fight about the baby (now red-faced and screaming)

*You're hurting the baby*

*I'm not hurting the baby*

she (he) would have this baby

but he (she) would not let go

*In this way the issue was decided (The 'baby' was 'divided')*

Note: Light imagery, or images of the child/photo are other possible elements of structure for the story.

**C. Small-Group Activity:** Discuss your outlines, compare 'significant' items and try to clarify the items you had listed as "unclear" during the first reading.

**D. Re-read *Little Things* and then read Student 1's comments from her blog:**

**Student 1:**

*Possible interpretations are that if the actors in a moment of crisis choose aggression, physical and verbal aggression escalates. The other choice of response to crisis, the way of wisdom and restraint, might diffuse tension and foster a positive resolution to the crisis.*

*In the story the man is linear in his behavior, and somehow neutral at the beginning. His resolve to separate from the woman is non-negotiable, is final from the*

*beginning of the story. This is indicated by his lack of reaction to her verbal provocation. The only stimulus he reacts to is her deliberate appropriation of the child's picture.*

*On the other hand, the woman seems to be trying to salvage her relationship with the man by provoking a climax to the accumulated hostilities in hopes of a continued relationship. Her persistent verbal attacks on the man are not in consonance with her tears. She tries to manipulate the situation by taking the baby's picture from the bed, provoking a response from the man. Next she uses the actual child as an instrument to keep him from leaving, holding the baby in the kitchen doorway, not realizing her ploy will backfire and stimulate the man to decide to take the baby from her.*

**E.** Class discussion: Identify elements of how the dramatic tension is staged in Carver's short story. Consider the roles of reaction and counter-reaction in the behavior of the two parents.

**F.** Journal entry in your blog: Consider any cases of divorce/separation among your family, or close circle of friends or community. Were the children of the respective couple the object of the dispute? Write 300-400 words to express your point of view of this experience (in your journal).

### **G. Project work**

Write a 30-second radio news spot from "the scene of the crime" informing the public of the incident of domestic violence that occurs in *Small Things*. See the sample below. Tape this news spot in small groups. Re-record as needed.

### Sample News Clip

*When the ambulance arrived at the ZZZ apartments early this evening, young baby Smith was unconscious with dislocations of left shoulder and right hip. The child had been stretched in a tug-of-war by his parents. The child was pronounced dead on arrival at St. Elsewhere Hospital at seven o'clock p.m. Both parents, A and B Smith were placed under arrest for child abuse and for murder and taken to the county jail pending arraignment tomorrow.*

**H.** Play all tapes in class. Splice several tapes together, add script as necessary to produce a longer radio commentary on the subject of domestic violence.

**J.** Read the comment Carver makes about the pleasures to be found in the act of reading. Now that you have read and reflected a lot on your own reactions to Carver's short story, you may wish to add other things which explain why reading is many people's favorite pastime. Jot down these ideas and compare them with your partner's.

*"It's possible," says Raymond Carver, "to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow these things – a chair, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring – with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader's spine." Carver's short stories and poems often turn on just such moments of unexpected revelation of beauty or terror. Like many others contemporary writers, Carver doubts the power of fiction to effect social, political, or even personal change ("perhaps it's different in poetry," he says). Instead, he believes, "it just has to be there for the fierce pleasure we take in doing it, and the different kind of pleasure that's taken in reading something that's durable and made to last, as well as beautiful in and of itself. Something that throws off these sparks – a persistent and steady glow, however dim."*

Harper American Literature Vol. 2, 1987, New York: Harper and Row Publishers

**K.** Write for ten minutes ideas generated by the following comment: “*The study of literature demands that students search for a reasoned understanding of distanced problems*”.

### **By Way of Explanation**

Given the widespread ignorance of fundamental religious texts perpetuated by Romania’s recent totalitarian experience, my recurrent choice of the Old Testament for a number of exercises requires an explanation. Beyond the pedagogical value of skimming & scanning and schema-setting for the Carver story, the university students in my target group get exposure to the Old Testament for its intellectual interest and literary background. The fact that it is such an old (and primary) source makes much of what has been written since have symbolic or direct reference to the Old Testament. Intertextuality operates at all levels of meaning. True, a lot of discussion at the level of the critical meta-language about the link between the modern texts and fundamental religious texts is available, but seldom is there a direct and consistent invitation to take a first-hand parallel reading of biblical and modern texts as a starting point for reflection. I believe such an approach is entirely in the spirit of this dissertation.

## THE CALM

I was getting a haircut. I was in the chair and three men were sitting along the wall across from me. Two of the men waiting I'd never seen before. But one of them I recognized, though I couldn't exactly place him. I kept looking at him as the barber worked on my hair. The man was moving a toothpick around in his mouth, a heavyset man, short wavy hair. And then I saw him in a cap and uniform, little eyes watchful in the lobby of a bank.

Of the other two, one was considerably the older, with a full head of curly gray hair. He was smoking. The third, though not so old, was nearly bald on top, but the hair at the sides hung over his ears. He had on logging boots, pants shiny with machine oil.

The barber put a hand on top of my head to turn me for a better look. Then he said to the guard, "Did you get your deer, Charles?"

I liked this barber. We weren't acquainted well enough to call each other by name. But when I came for a haircut, he knew me. He knew I used to fish. So we'd talk fishing. I don't think he hunted. But he could talk on any subject. In this regard, he was a good barber.

"Bill, it's a funny story. The damnedest thing," the guard said. He took out the toothpick and laid it in the ashtray. He shook his head. "I did and I didn't. So yes and no to your question."

I didn't like the man's voice. For a guard, the voice didn't fit. It wasn't the voice you'd expect.

The two other men looked up. The older man was turning the pages of a magazine, smoking, and the other fellow was holding a newspaper. They put down what they were looking at and turned to listen to the guard.

"Go on, Charles," the barber said. "Let's hear it."

The barber turned my head again, and went back to work with his clippers.

**"We were** up on Fikle Ridge. My old man and me and the kid. We were hunting those draws. My old man was stationed at the head of one, and me and the kid were at the head of another. The kid had a hangover, goddamn his hide. The kid, he was green around the gills and drank water all day, mine and his both. It was in the afternoon and we'd been out since daybreak. But we had our hopes. We figured the hunters down below would move a deer in our direction. So we were sitting behind a log and watching the draw when we heard this shooting down in the valley."

"There's orchards down there," said the fellow with the newspaper. He was fidgeting a lot and kept crossing a leg, swinging his boot for a time, and then crossing his legs the other way. "Those deer hang out around those orchards."

"That's right," said the guard. "They'll go in there at night, the bastards, and eat those little green apples. Well, we heard this shooting and we're just sitting there on our hands when this big old buck comes up out of the underbrush not a hundred feet away. The kid sees him the same time I do, of course, and he throws down and starts banging. The knot-head. That old buck wasn't in any danger. Not from the kid, as it turns out. But he can't tell where the shots are coming from. He doesn't know which way to jump. Then I get off a shot. But in all the commotion, I just stun him."

"Stunned him?" the barber said.

“You know, stun him,” the guard said. “It was a gut shot. It just like stuns him. So he drops his head and begins this trembling. He trembles all over. The kid’s still shooting. Me, I felt like I was back in Korea. So I shot again but missed. Then old Mr. Buck moves back into the brush. But now, by God, he doesn’t have any oomph left in him. The kid has emptied his goddamn gun all to no purpose. But I hit solid. I’d rammed one right in his guts. That’s what I meant by stunned him.”

“Then what?” said the fellow with the newspaper, who had rolled it and was tapping it against his knee. “Then what? You must have trailed him. They find a hard place to die every time.”

“But you trailed him?” the older man asked, though it wasn’t really a question.

“I did. Me and the kid, we trailed him. But the kid wasn’t good for much. He gets sick on the trail, slows us down. That chucklehead.” The guard had to laugh now, thinking about that situation. “Drinking beer and chasing all night, then saying he can hunt deer. He knows better now, by God. But, sure, we trailed him. A good trail, too. Blood on the ground and blood on the leaves. Blood everywhere. Never seen a buck with so much blood. I don’t know how the sucker kept going.”

“Sometimes they’ll go forever,” the fellow with the newspaper said. “They find them a hard place to die every time.”

“I chewed the kid out for missing his shot, and when he smarted off at me, I cuffed him a good one. Right here.” The guard pointed to the side of his head and grinned. “I boxed his goddamn ears for him, that goddamn kid. He’s not too old. He needed it. So the point is, it got too dark to trail, what with the kid laying back to vomit and all.”

Well, the coyotes will have that deer by now,” the fellow with the newspaper said. “Them and the crows and the buzzards.”

He unrolled the newspaper, smoothed it all the way out, and put it off to one side. He crossed a leg again. He looked around at the rest of us and shook his head.

The older man had turned in his chair and was looking out the window. He lit a cigarette.

“I figure so,” the guard said. “Pity too. He was a big old son of a bitch. So in answer to your question, Bill, I both got my deer and I didn’t. But we had venison on the table anyway. Because it turns out the old man had got himself a little spike in the meantime. Already has him back to camp, hanging out and gutted slick as a whistle, liver, heart, and kidneys wrapped in wax paper and already setting in the cooler. A spike. Just a little bastard. But the old man, he was tickled.”

The guard looked around the shop as if remembering. The he picked up his toothpick and stuck it back in his mouth.

The old man put his cigarette out and turned to the guard. He drew a breath and said, “You ought to be out there right now looking for that deer instead of in here getting a haircut.”

“You can’t talk like that,” the guard said. “You old fart. I’ve seen you someplace.”

“I’ve seen you too,” the old fellow said.

“Boys, that’s enough. This is my barbershop,” the barber said.

“I ought to box *your* ears,” the old fellow said.

“You ought to try it,” the guard said.

“Charles,” the barber said.

The barber put his comb and scissors on the counter and his hands on my shoulders, as if he thought I was thinking to spring from the chair into the middle of it. “Albert, I’ve been cutting Charles’s head of hair, and his boy’s too, for years now. I wish you wouldn’t pursue this.”

The barber looked from one man to the other and kept his hands on my shoulders.

“Take it outside,” the fellow with the newspaper said, flushed and hoping for something.

“That’ll be enough,” the barber said. “Charles, I don’t want to hear anything more on the subject. Albert, you’re next in line. Now.” The barber turned to the fellow with the newspaper. “I don’t know you from Adam, mister, but I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t put your oar in.”

**The guard** got up. He said, “I think I’ll come back for my cut later. Right now the company leaves something to be desired.”

The guard went out and pulled the door closed, hard.

The old fellow sat smoking his cigarette. He looked out the window. He examined something on the back of his hand. He got up and put on his hat.

“I’m sorry, Bill,” the old fellow said. “I can go a few more days.”

“That’s all right, Albert,” the barber said.

When the old fellow went out, the barber stepped over to the window to watch him go.

“Albert’s about dead from emphysema,” the barber said from the window. “We used to fish together. Ha taught me salmon inside out. The women. They used to crawl all over that old boy. He’s picked up a temper, though. But in all honesty, there was provocation.”

The man with the newspaper couldn’t sit still. He was on his feet and moving around, stopping to examine everything, the hat rack, the photos of Bill and his friends, the calendar from the hardware showing scenes for each month of the year. He flipped every page. He even went so far as to stand and scrutinize Bill’s barbering license, which was up on the wall in a frame. Then he turned and said, “I’m going too,” and out he went just like he said.

“Well, do you want me to finish barbering this hair or not?” the barber said to me as if I was the cause of everything.

**The barber** turned me in the chair to face the mirror. He put a hand to either side of my head. He positioned me a last time, and then he brought his head down next to mine.

We looked into the mirror together, his hands still framing my head.

I was looking at myself, and he was looking at me too. But if the barber saw something, he didn’t offer comment.

He ran his fingers through my hair. He did it slowly, as if thinking about something else. He ran his fingers through my hair. He did it tenderly, as a lover would.

That was in Crescent City, California, up near the Oregon border. I left soon after. But today I was thinking of that place, of Crescent City, and of how I was trying out a new life there with my wife, and how, in the barber’s chair that morning, I had made up my mind to go. I was thinking today about the calm I felt when I closed my eyes and let the barber’s fingers move through my hair, the sweetness of those fingers, the hair already starting to grow.

## NOTES ON *THE CALM*

### I. Pre-Reading

#### A. Homework assignment:

In three-five paragraphs, write about an occurrence which involved people from three generations of your family or community (preferably of the same gender) who were trying to accomplish a common goal. The story might include such small experiences as learning to change a tire, have their hair done at the beauty salon, teach or learn something, hunt for mushrooms, make wine, wash windows, go camping, hunting or fishing, etc.

Focus on the quality of the intergenerational interaction. Was there particular respect - or lack of it - displayed relative to particular issues? Were there linguistic barriers that affected intergenerational communication?

**B.** Peer edit your paper with a partner.

**C.** In small groups, excluding your partner in exercise **B.**, retell the story of your occurrence. Briefly discuss similarities, differences, surprises, etc. that exist in the stories of the group. One representative from each group reports common themes and one occurrence to the class.

**D.** Small Group Discussion: Compare examples of name-calling incidents you have encountered. Do you think name-calling is culturally specific? Do you notice differences in the use - or absence - of personal verbal attacks such as name-calling or threats of violence among the following categories:

- in the second person: direct address, (face to face, or to unknown individual as in “road rage incidents”)
- in the third person (disrespecting or ‘dissing’ a person when he or she is not present)
- among native speakers of English from various countries
- among Romanians returning to Romania after living in other countries and using English as a second language
- among Romanians
- among native speakers of other languages

### **Dissing**

Dissing is a black art form of putting people down to their face. It is done joyfully, openly, and often in the spirit of friendly competition. A lot of Rap is actually dissing. The movie *7 Mile* – about the life of Eminem – is based on this linguistic phenomenon.

### **Road Rage**

Road rage tends to be a global pattern of expressing aggression. All over America drivers are being punished by road rage. This compounds the problem by producing road rage in the attacked driver. Road rage retaliation tactics run from swearing, name-calling and inappropriate gestures to deliberate braking and using a car as a weapon. There have even been reports of physical fights and death by shooting.

### **Aggressive Behavior in the Black and White Communities: Conceptual Framework**

When does a fight begin?

One important factor in the ways blacks and whites interpret aggressive behavior is their conception of when a fight begins. Whites consider fighting to have begun when violence is imminent, that is, before violence has actually occurred. Typically, the fight is considered to have started upon a loud public dispute and the establishment of confrontation. Other signs that indicate to whites that a fight has begun are the intensity of the anger and the presence of insults which indicate that the violence is intentional.

Blacks do not consider these signs sufficient to conclude that a fight has actually begun. If there are threats and insults and challenges to fight, this might be ‘woofing’ which is within the framework of talking. Fighting begins when someone actually makes a provocative movement.

adapted from Black and White Styles in Conflict, by Thomas Kochman, 1981, University of Chicago Press

E. Read the following clip from the Internet. Write about one hundred words about how much of a contributory factor “name-calling” is to the phenomenon of road rage. Have you experienced these examples in person or through the media?

Studies of people who experience road rage found there are particular factors that lead to road rage. These factors occur when another driver:

- uses swearing or name calling
- comes to a rolling stop
- speeds
- doesn't signal when changing lanes
- makes an illegal turn
- is following too closely
- goes through a red light
- fails to yield

Positive ways to handle road rage are:

- use positive thought & action
- remember people make mistakes. In human activity there is a 4-10% average chance of mistake
- practice safe driving
- acquire a supportive driving philosophy
- don't challenge aggressive drivers
- avoid aggressive drivers and report them to your traffic authorities
- be physically fit and able to drive
- reduce the stress in your daily life with exercise, meditation, deep breathing, reading or hobbies
- eat properly and get enough rest
- take supportive vitamins, minerals, and nutrients

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Note: In the USA, professional drivers of city buses are screened for tendencies toward road rage before being hired. In addition, at least eight hours of initial training are dedicated toward understanding how to avoid and/or to cope with road rage.

## II. While-Reading Writing

A. Annotate text or take notes while reading *The Calm*; note the different levels of formality in speech patterns among the men, and the effect of name-calling on the characters. How do you react to name-calling generally and to the instances of name-calling in this text?

### B. Project work assignment:

In groups of five, use your notes and the text to convert the story into a play script (perhaps with an omniscient narrator). Starting with the next class, each group presents their one-act play in consecutive classes. Video taping or voice recording are options.

## III. Post-Reading Writing

### A. Homework assignment:

Free-write a journal entry about this text. Reflect on and add to the annotations you made while reading. Be ready and willing to change your early impressions of the text if you are inclined to do so. You might write about related experiences or ideas.

You may want to support or contradict the author's ideas and universe, and discuss passages or examples from texts that are notable either because you like them or you do not, or because you agree with them or you do not. You might describe how you would feel if you met someone who talked like Charlie, the guard.

**B.** Small group activity: Compare journal entries: each group decides on the most interesting journal entries to be reported to the whole class.

**C. Worksheet # 1**

In-class writing: in fifteen minutes, write a summary of the story.

**D.** Small group activity: Compare your summaries. Review any discrepancies.

**E.** Read the four hunting accident reports from the State of Colorado Department of Wildlife Management, U.S.A. Which one seems closest to the events of the story of the hunt in *The Calm*? Discuss your choice with your deskmate.

#### Hunting Accident Report #1

INJURY TYPE: Nonfatal	SELF-INFLICTED: No	
DATE: 11/10/01	TIME: 10:30AM	
COUNTY: Yuma	LANDOWNERSHIP: Private	
ANIMAL HUNTED: Pheasant	DISTANCE FROM MUZZLE: 51-100 yards	
SHOOTER DETAILS: Unknown		
Was a game law violated? Yes		Which law? 33-6-122
WEAPON: Shotgun		
VICTIM SEX: M AGE: 13 CITY: Thornton, CO		
TOPOGRAPHY: Flat	VISIBILITY: Fair	COVER TYPE: Medium
LIGHTING: Sunny	WEATHER: Clear	
FACTORS: Victim covered by shooter swinging on game.		
SUMMARY: Five hunters hunted field. Victim and one other hunter were blocking. A rooster flushed and flew toward blockers - 2 people shot. Victim later complained about some pain in his legs. 6 pellets hit him in both thighs, abdomen & 1 ankle. All were superficial wounds. (Shooters claimed they were in a shallow depression when bird flushed and that they could not see the blockers.)		

## Hunting Accident Report # 2

INJURY TYPE: Nonfatal	SELF-INFLICTED: No	
DATE: 11/11/01	TIME: 2:30 PM	
COUNTY: Logan	LANDOWNERSHIP: Private	
ANIMAL HUNTED: Pheasant	DISTANCE FROM MUZZLE: Unknown	
SHOOTER DETAILS: Unknown		
Was a game law violated? Yes		Which law? 33-6-122
VICTIM SEX: M AGE: 52 CITY: Sterling, CO		
FACTORS: Victim covered by shooter swinging on game.		
SUMMARY: Victim was hunting pheasants and kneeling in tall grass. Friend flushed a pheasant and fired. Victim was hit in chin with 1 pellet and in his tongue with one pellet. He was taken to Sterling Hospital to have the pellet in his tongue removed.		

## Hunting Accident Report # 3

INJURY TYPE: Nonfatal	SELF-INFLICTED: No	
DATE: 11/11/01	TIME: 3:00 PM	
COUNTY: Yuma	LANDOWNERSHIP: Private	
ANIMAL HUNTED: Pheasant	DISTANCE FROM MUZZLE: 11-50 yards	
SHOOTER DETAILS: Case pending		
Was a game law violated? Yes		Which law? 33-6-122
WEAPON: Shotgun MAKE: S&W 1200 CALIBER/GAUGE: 12		
VICTIM SEX: M AGE: 51 CITY: Loveland, CO		
SAFETY POSITION: Off		
TOPOGRAPHY: Flat	VISIBILITY: Good	COVER TYPE: Medium
LIGHTING: Sunny	WEATHER: Clear	
FACTORS: Victim covered by shooter swinging on game.		
SUMMARY: Victim was one of three people blocking a corner pivot. Quail flew between walkers and blockers. Victim saw blast coming through grass from the direction of one of the walkers. The impact knocked victim backward. He could see his arm was bleeding and feel that a few pellets had entered his chest. Victim was transported to Holyoke Hospital in the ambulance and taken to Denver via "Flight for Life." He had 53 pellets removed from his body: head, right arm, chest and left leg.		

## Hunting Accident Report # 4

INJURY TYPE: Fatal	SELF-INFLICTED: Yes	
DATE: 11/29/01	TIME: 7:30 AM	
COUNTY: Chaffee	LANDOWNERSHIP: Private	
ANIMAL HUNTED: Elk	DISTANCE FROM MUZZLE: 0-10 yards	
SHOOTER SEX: M AGE: 75 CITY: Salida, CO		
HUNTER ED CERTIFIED: No		
Was a game law violated? No		Which law?
WEAPON: Rifle MAKE: Remington 760 CALIBER/GAUGE: .270		
SAFETY POSITION: Off VICTIM: Self		
TOPOGRAPHY: Hilly	VISIBILITY: Good	COVER TYPE: Medium
LIGHTING: Overcast	WEATHER: Windy	
FACTORS: Running/walking with a loaded firearm		
SUMMARY: Victim had shot/wounded a cow elk and was crossing irrigation ditch for second shot. It appears he may have been using his rifle as a cane, muzzle up. He slipped and fell. Bullet passed through neck from front to back, slightly upward, just to the right of throat and spine.		

Colorado Hunter Education Home Page (This page last updated 05/19/03)

Note: A wounded animal cannot be pursued onto private land without the permission of the private landowner. (Colorado Hunter Education Home Page)

F. Read the excerpt below and fill out the worksheet.

From *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* by Ernest Hemingway  
American Tradition in Literature, Vol. 2, New York: Grosset & Dunlap Inc.

Then they went down the steep bank and across the stream, climbing over and around the boulders and up the other bank pulling up by some projecting roots, and along it until they found where the lion has been trotting when Macomber first shot. There was dark blood on the short grass that the gun-bearers pointed out with grass stems, and that ran behind the river bank trees.

“What do we do?” asked Macomber.

“Not much choice,” said Wilson. ... “we let him stiffen up a bit and then you and I’ll go in and have a look for him.”

“Can’t we set the grass on fire?” Macomber asked.

“Too green.”

“Can’t we send beaters?”

Wilson looked at him appraisingly. “Of course we can,” he said. But it’s just a touch murderous. You see we know the lion’s wounded. You can drive an unwounded lion – he’ll move on ahead of a noise – but a wounded lion’s going to charge. You can’t see him until you’re right on him. He’ll make himself perfectly flat in cover you wouldn’t think would hide a hare. You can’t very well send boys in there to that sort of a show. Somebody’s bound to get mauled.”

“What about the gun-bearers?”

“Oh, they’ll go with us. It’s their shauri (business or predicament). You see, they signed on for it. They don’t look too happy though, do they?”

“I don’t want to go there, said Macomber. It was out before he knew he’d said it.”

“Neither do I,” said Wilson very cheerily. “Really no choice though.” Then as an afterthought, he glanced at Macomber and saw suddenly how he was trembling and the pitiful look on his face.

“You don’t have to go in, of course, he said. That’s what I’m hired for, you know. That’s why I’m so expensive.”

“You mean you’d go in by yourself? Why not leave him there?”

Robert Wilson, whose entire occupation had been with the lion and the problem he presented, and who had not been thinking about Macomber except to note that he was rather windy, suddenly felt as though he had opened the wrong door in a hotel and seen something shameful.

“What do you mean?”

“Why not just leave him?”

“You mean pretend to ourselves he hasn’t been hit?”

“No. Just drop it.”

“It isn’t done.”

“Why not?”

“For one thing, he’s certain to be suffering. For another, someone else might run into him.”

“I see.”

“But you don’t have to have anything to do with it.”

“I’d like to,” Macomber said. “I’m just scared, you know”.

**G. Worksheet #1**

In Hemingway's story, a lesson is in progress:

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

How does the teaching here relate to Carver's story?

Compare answers with your deskmate.

## H. Worksheet # 2

Consider *The Calm* as a story within a story.

Identify the lesson(s) being taught in '*the story*'.

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

Identify the lesson being taught in '*the story within the story*'.

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

Compare answers with your deskmate.

**J. Worksheet # 3**

Consider the relationship between the narrator and the barber in *The Calm*.

Do they speak to each other?

How do they communicate?

Who initiates the communication?

What is the role of the barber?

What is the role of the narrator?

What is the issue to be communicated between them?

What is the outcome of their communication?

Take ten minutes to review the text and answer these questions. In small groups, compare your answers. How have your ideas changed after the small group discussion?

**K. Worksheet # 4**

Think again of the ‘teachings’ of *The Calm*.

Consider the text as *a story within a story within the story*.

Consider all the characters: the three hunters (Charles and his father and his son), the narrator and the barber, Arnold and the man with the newspaper. Can you give labels to all of the characters in the barber shop according to their role in the interaction?

*The story*

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

*The story within the story*

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

*The 2nd story within...*

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

In small groups compare your answers.

**L. Worksheet # 5**

Take fifteen minutes to write another summary of the short story.

After you finish this summary refer to the previous summary you wrote in exercise **C**.

How has your understanding of the story changed?

**M. Project Work (continued):**

Over the weeks, individual groups continue to perform one-act plays of *The Calm* in turn from their scripted texts. Stage directions should be included to reflect the learners' progressive interaction with and understanding of the text. Learners may use scripts during the presentations.

N. Read the poem *Death of the Deer* by the Romanian poet Nicolae Labis and write a 100-word summary of the poem. Transform the summary into a little poem.

Moartea	căprioarei
Seceta a ucis orice boare de vant. Soarele s-a topit si a curs pe pământ. A rămas cerul fierbinte si gol. Ciuturile scot din fantana namol. Peste paduri tot mai des focuri, focuri, Danseaza salbatice, satanice jocuri. Mă iau dupa tata la deal printre tarsuri, Si brazii mă zgarie, rai si uscati. Pornim amandoi vanatoarea de capre, Vanatoarea foametei în muntii Carpati. Setea mă naruie. Fierbe pe piatra Firul de apa prelins din cisma. Tampla apasa pe umar. Pasesc ca pe-o alta Planeta, imensa si grea. Asteptam intr-un loc unde inca mai suna, Din strunele undelor line, izvoarele. Când va scapata soarele, când va licari luna,	Mi se parea ca retraiesc un mit Cu fata prefacuta-n caprioara. De sus, lumina palida, lunara, Cernea pe blana-i calda flori calde de cires. Vai cum doream ca pentru-intaia oara Bataia pustii tatii să dea gres! Dar vaile vuiră. Cazuta în genunchi, Ea ridicase capul, il clatina spre stele, Il pravali apoi, starnind pe apa Fugare roiuri negre de margele. O pasare albastra zvacnise dintre ramuri, Si viata caprioarei spre zarile tarzii Zburase lin, cu tipat, ca pasarile toamna Când lasa cuiburi sure si pustii. Impleticit m-am dus si i-am inchis Ochii umbrosi, trist strajuiti de coarne,

Aici vor veni să s-adape  
 Una cate una caprioarele.  
 Spun tatii ca mi-i sete si-mi face  
 semn să tac.  
 Ametitoare apa, ce limpede te  
 clatini!  
 Mă simt legat prin sete de vietatea  
 care va muri  
 La ceas oprit de lege si de datini.  
 Cu fosnet vestejit rasufla valea.  
 Ce-ngrozitoare inserare pluteste-n  
 univers!  
 Pe zare curge sange si pieptul mi-i  
 rosu, de parca  
 Mainile pline de sange pe piept mi  
 le-am sters.  
 Ca pe-un altar ard ferigi cu flacari  
 vinetii,  
 Si stelele uimite clipira printre ele.  
 Vai, cum as vrea să nu mai vii, să  
 nu mai vii,  
 Frumoasa jertfa a padurii mele!  
 Ea s-arata saltand si se opri  
 Privind în jur c-un fel de teama,  
 Si narile-i subtiri infiorara apa  
 Cu cercuri lunecoase de arama.  
 Sticlea în ochii-i umezi ceva  
 nelamurit,  
 Stiam ca va muri si c-o s-o doara.

Si-am tresarit tacut si alb când  
 tata  
 Mi-a suierat cu bucurie: - Avem  
 carne!  
 Spun tatii ca mi-i sete si-mi face  
 semn să beau.  
 Ametitoare apa, ce-ntunecat te  
 clatini!  
 Mă simt legat prin sete de  
 vietatea care a murit  
 La ceas oprit de lege si de  
 datini...  
 Dar legea ni-i desarta si straina  
 Când viata-n noi cu greu se mai  
 anina,  
 Iar datina si mila sunt desarte,  
 Când soru-mea-i flamanda,  
 bolnava si pe moarte.  
 Pe-o nara pusca tatii scoate fum.  
 Vai, fără vant alearga frunzarele  
 duium!  
 Inalta tata foc infricosat.  
 Vai, cat de mult padurea s-a  
 schimbat!  
 Din ierburi prind în maini fără să  
 stiu  
 Un clopotel cu clinchet  
 argintiu...  
 De pe frigare tata scoate-n  
 unghii  
 Inima caprioarei si rarunchii.  
 Ce-i inima? Mi-i foame! Vreau  
 să traiesc si-as vrea ....  
 Tu, iarta-mă, fecioara - tu,  
 caprioara mea!  
 Mi-i somn. Ce nalt îi focul! Si  
 codrul, ce adânc!  
 Plang. Ce gandeste tata? Mananc  
 si plang. Mananc!

**O.** Write a journal/log entry responding to the poem.

**P.** Discussion: Learner-generated questions and answers regarding:

- ethics in hunting
- name-calling and what it indicates about the caller
- the effect of making value judgments in group discussions
- inter-generational activities and other initiation patterns

**Q.** Teacher-led discussion about the need for students to remain open to changing interpretations of the texts as they interact with it and develop different understandings of situation, character and inter-play.

**R. Essay writing:**

Give an analysis and a synthesis of at least 3 different ideas or values that are dealt with in this text.

**Structure of essays**

- Paragraph 1. Introduction of three different concepts found in the text.  
Paragraph 2. Discuss concept #1, look at the component parts of the issue.  
Paragraph 3. Discuss concept #2, look at the component parts of this issue.  
Paragraph 4. Discuss concept #3, look at the component parts of this issue.  
Paragraph 5. Fit the 3 concepts together: show how they are relevant to each other and to the overall understanding of the text of *The Calm*.

**S. In-class Exam:** Choose one and write about 300 words:

- Retell the story of *The Calm* through the eyes of any character except the man getting a haircut.
- Write a letter to the author of either *The Calm*, *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, or *Death of the Deer*.

### **Additional Support and Suggestions**

**I.D.** According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, violent incidents between drivers have increased 51% since 1990. One of the primary factors contributing to these road rage incidents has been found to be name-calling. Though these exercises on name calling are interesting linguistically, it seems they are more important from a cultural point of view. Road rage is one context in which the aggressiveness of the society is reflected in language. Aggressiveness is often considered among the positive qualities of the American Society. This perhaps is why aggressive speech is endemic to the culture.

#### Case Study I:

10-year-old girl, Romanian, 2 years of school in Romania, 3 years of school in USA, the only immigrant pupil in a school of white, upper class Americans. During summer return visit to Romania she uses name calling patterns in English (i.e. "that stupid

driver!”, “Meanie!” (about a street vendor), “I hate you “(to family and friends who refuse her various requests). She does not exhibit this linguistic pattern in the Romanian language, but she does exhibit it in English in the Romanian context. Her pattern is perceived as totally inappropriate by the Romanian interlocutors and on-lookers.

Note: Bilingualism does not assure cross-cultural competence.

#### Case Study II:

Middle-aged Romanian woman, highly professional, qualified and controlled in all circumstances of her life except when behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. This woman took her own 10-year-old son by surprise in 2001 with the language, vocal tone, and body language she directed toward another driver on the streets of her town.

Note: Aggressive language seems to be easily imported through the media.

#### Case Study III:

British male teacher of English in Eastern Europe uses crass language inappropriately with other teachers of English from many countries, and with the local students and neighbours.

Note: Teacher was not given feedback about the inappropriateness of his language directly, but other foreign teachers of English heard complaints from the local students and teachers about the pragmatics of his language.

**I.D. and II.A.** Pedagogical value of these exercises:

The pragmatic use of language by Charlie, the guard, in *The Calm* suggests a pattern of name calling that is common in the United States. This subject is relevant to the English language use of Romanian university students for several reasons. They are exposed to this pragmatic language use through the media and especially through the American movies. They are often exposed to this level of language when they study abroad. They also hear such language patterns from Romanian friends, colleagues and family members (particularly school aged children) who return from English speaking countries (the USA in particular) with a sudden but often unaware proclivity for name calling.

**II.A.**

Speech samples of 'the Guard, Charles'

*The Kid, damn his hide* (his son)

*The bastards!* (deer in the orchards)

*The knothed* (his son)

*The kid has emptied his goddamn gun ...*

*That chucklehead!* (his son – Archie Bunkerism for 'knucklehead')

*The sucker* (the buck)

*I chewed him out ... cuffed him a good one ... boxed his goddamn ears, that goddamn kid.*

*He was a big old s.o.b.* (the buck)

*Just a little bastard.* (the 'spike' (?) deer)

*You old fart.* (to Albert)

*I ought to box your ears.* (to Albert)

*I think I'll come back later ... company leaves something to be desired.*

Speech samples of 'the barber'

*Did you get your deer, Charles?*

*Go on Charles, let's hear it.*

*Stunned him?*

*Boys, that's enough. This is my barber shop.  
 Charles, Albert, I've been cutting Charles's head of hair, and his boy's too, for years  
 now. I wish you wouldn't pursue this.  
 That'll be enough.  
 Charles, I don't want to hear anything more on the subject.  
 Albert, you're next in line. Now.  
 I don't know you from Adam, mister, but I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't put your oar in.  
 But in all honesty there was provocation.*

Speech and body language samples of 'Albert'

*"But you trailed him?" the older man asked, though it wasn't really a question.  
 The older man had turned in his chair and was looking out the window. He lit a cigarette.  
 The older man put his cigarette out and turned to the guard. He drew a breath and said,  
 "You ought to be out there right now looking for that deer instead of in here getting a  
 haircut."  
 I've seen you too," the old fellow said.  
 I ought to box your ears," the old fellow said.  
 I'm sorry, Bill," the old fellow said. "I can go a few more days."*

### III.A. Sample journal entry

*I don't know the word 'spike' ... probably a young male deer ...*

*With bud antlers that haven't branched yet... I didn't think it legal to kill them ... but  
 males might be OK by law. In the dictionaries, spike (n.) is a hard, thin, pointed piece  
 of metal, wood, etc.*

*Language seems a good way to study this text ... formal barber, obscene guard ...*

*On 2nd reading, I'd want to watch the other 2 men more ...*

*Albert's judgment/value judgment was the moment of group breakdown.*

*Barber had hands on author/narrator 5 times – 2 x turned his head, 2 x hands on  
 shoulders, 1 x looked in mirror. I don't know how to think about this. I don't think  
 they're gay ????*

### **III.C. Sample summary # 1**

5 men in a barbershop share a story about a hunting trip taken by one of them, 'Charlie, the guard' with his father and with his son. As the story unfolds, discourse styles vary widely between the laconic, courteous, friendly barber and the garrulous, foul-mouthed, name-calling, Charlie. Communication within the group breaks down and violence is threatened after 'Albert' passes value judgment on Charlie's failure to track his wounded prey in order to prevent the animal from suffering. The narrator - in the barber's chair - later recalls the life-changing effect of the incident on his subsequent life.

### **Sample summary # 2**

The setting of this story is in a barbershop. The narrator is the one who is getting a haircut from Bill. Three men are sitting around talking. One man (Charles, a guard) told a story of hunting with his father and younger brother or son.

The summary of the hunting story focuses on generational differences. While hunting a buck, the son demonstrates youthful impatience. Charles becomes impatient with the kid and uses physical violence to solve the problem. Meanwhile, the father had already shot killed and skinned a deer. This provided food for the family.

Two more characters were in the shop, one with a cigarette (Albert) and one with a newspaper. The man with the cigarette was criticizing the hunting tactics used by Charles. Charles becomes incensed and walks out of the shop. It is later learned that Albert is dying of emphysema. The man with the newspaper is apparently Albert's friend. He is very nervous.

At the end of the story, it is implied that the barber and author are going to have a homosexual relationship.

Note: Be sure to send paragraphs of your essay by email. These paragraphs do not need to be in order.

**III.F.** At the global level of reading theory, the story changes with each reader and with each reading, as the reader(s) interact with the text.

*The n<sup>th</sup> story within ...*

Who is the teacher?

Who is the learner?

What is being taught?

## CHEF'S HOUSE

**That summer** Wes rented a furnished house north of Eureka from a recovered alcoholic named Chef. Then he called to ask me to forget what I had going and to move up there and live with him. He said he was on the wagon. I knew about that wagon. But he wouldn't take no for an answer. He called again and said, Edna, you can see the ocean from the front window. You can smell salt in the air. I listened to him talk. He didn't slur his words. I said, I'll think about it. And I did. A week later he called again and said, Are you coming? I said I was still thinking. He said, We'll start over. I said, If I come up there, I want you to do something for me. Name it, Wes said. I said, I want you to try and be the Wes I used to know. The old Wes. The Wes I married. Wes began to cry, but I took it as a sign of his good intentions. So I said, All right, I'll come up.

Wes had quit his girlfriend, or she'd quit him – I didn't know, I didn't care. When I made up my mind to go with Wes, I had to say goodbye to my friend. My friend said, You're making a mistake. He said, Don't do this to me. What about us? he said. I said, I have to do it for Wes's sake. He's trying to stay sober. You remember what that's like. I remember, my friend said, but I don't want you to go. I said, I'll go for the summer. Then I'll see. I'll come back, I said. He said, What about me? What about my sake? Don't come back, he said.

**We drank** coffee, pop, and all kinds of fruit juice that summer. The whole summer, that's what we had to drink. I found myself wishing the summer wouldn't end. I knew better, but after a month of being with Wes in Chef's house, I put my wedding ring back on. I hadn't worn the ring in two years. Not since the night Wes was drunk and threw his ring into a peach orchard.

Wes had a little money, so I didn't have to work. And it turned out Chef was letting us have the house for almost nothing. We didn't have a telephone. We paid the gas and light and shopped for specials at the Safeway. One Sunday afternoon Wes went out to get a sprinkler and came back with something for me. He came back with a nice bunch of daisies and a straw hat.

Tuesday evenings we'd go to a movie. Other nights Wes would go to what he called his Don't Drink meetings. Chef would pick him up in his car at the door and drive him home again afterward. Some days Wes and I would go fishing for trout in one freshwater lagoon nearby. We'd fish off the bank and take all day to catch a few little ones. They'll do fine, I'd say, and that night I'd fry them for supper. Sometimes I'd take off my hat and fall asleep on a blanket next to my fishing pole. The last thing I'd remember would be clouds passing overhead toward the central valley. At night, Wes would take me in his arms and ask me if I was still his girl.

Our kids kept their distance. Cheryl lived with some people on a farm in Oregon. She looked after a herd of goats and sold the milk. She kept bees and put up jars of honey. She had her own life, and I didn't blame her. She didn't care one way or the other about what her dad and I did so long as we didn't get her into it. Bobby was in Washington working in the hay. After the haying season, he planned to work in the apples. He had a girl and was saving his money. I wrote letters and signed them, "Love always."

**One afternoon** Wes was in the yard pulling weeds when Chef drove up in front of the house. I was working at the sink. I looked and saw Chef's big car pull in. I could see his car, the access road and the freeway, and, behind the freeway, the dunes and the ocean. Clouds hung over the water. Chef got out of his car and hitched his pants. I knew there was something. Wes stopped what he was doing and stood up. He was wearing his gloves and a canvas hat. He took off his hat and wiped his face with the back of his hand. Chef walked over and put his arm around Wes's shoulders. Wes took off one of his gloves. I went to the door. I heard Chef say to Wes God knows he was sorry but he was going to have to ask us to leave at the end of the month. Wes pulled off his other glove. Why's that, Chef? Chef said his daughter, Linda, the woman Wes used to call Fat Linda from the time of his drinking days, needed a place to live and this place was it. Chef told Wes that Linda's husband had taken his fishing boat out a few weeks back and nobody had heard from him since. She's my own blood, Chef said to Wes. She's lost her husband. She's lost her baby's father. I can help. I'm glad I'm in a position to help, Chef said. I'm sorry, Wes, but you'll have to look for another house. Then Chef hugged Wes again, hitched his pants, and got in his big car and drove away. Wes came inside the house. He dropped his hat and gloves on the carpet and sat down in the big chair. Chef's chair, it occurred to me. Chef's carpet, even. Wes looked pale. I poured two cups of coffee and gave one to him. It's all right, I said. Wes, don't worry about it, I said. I sat down on Chef's sofa with my coffee.

Fat Linda's going to live here now instead of us, Wes said. He held his cup, but he didn't drink from it.

Wes, don't get stirred up, I said.

Her man will turn up in Ketchikan, Wes said. Fat Linda's husband has simply pulled out on them. And who could blame him? Wes said. Wes said if it came to that, he'd go down with his ship, too, rather than live the rest of his days with Fat Linda and her kid. Then Wes put his cup down next to his gloves. This has been a happy house up to now, he said. We'll get another house, I said.

Not like this one, Wes said. It wouldn't be the same, anyway. This house has been a good house for us. This house has good memories to it. Now Fat Linda and her kid will be in here, Wes said. He picked up his cup and tasted from it.

It's Chef's house, I said. He has to do what he has to do.

I know that, Wes said. But I don't have to like it.

Wes had this look about him. I knew that look. He kept touching his lips with his tongue. He kept thumbing his shirt under his waistband. He got up from the chair and went to the window. He stood looking out the ocean and at the clouds, which were building up. He patted his chin with his fingers like he was thinking about something. And he *was* thinking.

Go easy, Wes, I said.

She wants me to go easy, Wes said. He kept standing there.

But in a minute he came over and sat next to me on the sofa. He crossed one leg over the other and began fooling with the buttons on his shirt. I took his hand. I started to talk. I talked about the summer. But I caught myself talking like it was something that had happened in the past. Maybe years back. At any rate, like something that was over. Then I started talking about the kids. Wes said he wished he could do it over again and do it right this time.

They love you, I said.

No, they don't, he said.

I said, Someday, they'll understand things.

Maybe, Wes said. But it won't matter then.

You don't know, I said.

I know a few things, Wes said, and looked at me. I know I'm glad you came up here. I won't forget you did it, Wes said.

I'm glad, too, I said. I'm glad you found this house, I said.

Wes snorted. Then he laughed. We both laughed. That Chef, Wes said, and shook his head. He threw us a knuckleball, that son of a bitch. But I'm glad you wore your ring. I'm glad we had us this time together, Wes said.

Then I said something. I said, Suppose, just suppose, nothing had ever happened. Suppose this was for the first time. Just suppose. It doesn't hurt to suppose. Say none of the other had ever happened. You know what I mean? Then what? I said.

Wes fixed his eyes on me. He said, Then I suppose we'd have to be somebody else if that was the case. Somebody we're not. I don't have that kind of supposing left in me. We were born who we are. Don't you see what I'm saying?

I said I hadn't thrown away a good thing and come six hundred miles to hear him talk like this.

He said, I'm sorry, but I can't talk like somebody I'm not.

I'm not somebody else. If I was somebody else, I sure as hell wouldn't be here. If I was somebody else, I wouldn't be me.

But I'm who I am. Don't you see?

Wes, it's all right, I said. I brought his hand to my cheek. Then, I don't know, I remembered how he was when he was nineteen, the way he looked running across this field to where his dad sat on a tractor, hand over his eyes, watching Wes run toward him. We'd just driven up from California. I got out with Cheryl and Bobby and said, There's Grandpa. But they were just babies.

Wes sat next to me patting his chin, like he was trying to figure out the next thing. Wes's dad was gone and our kids were grown up. I looked at Wes and then I looked around Chef's living room at Chef's things, and I thought, We have to do something now and do it quick.

Hon, I said. Wes, listen to me.

What do you want? he said. But that's all he said. He seemed to have made up his mind.

But, having made up his mind, he was in no hurry. He leaned back on the sofa, folded his hands in his lap, and closed his eyes. He didn't say anything else.

I said his name to myself. It was an easy name to say, and I'd been used to saying it for a long time. Then I said it once more. This time I said it loud. Wes, I said.

He opened his eyes. But he didn't look at me. He just sat where he was and looked toward the window. Fat Linda, he said. But I knew it wasn't her. She was nothing. Just a name.

Wes got up and pulled the drapes and the ocean was gone just like that. I went in to start supper. We still had some fish in the icebox. There wasn't much else. We'll clean it up tonight, I thought, and that will be the end of it.

## **NOTES ON *CHEF'S HOUSE***

### **I. Pre-Reading Writing**

#### **A. Home assignment:**

Think of a personal traumatic life experience and reflect on its impact on your general conduct and life perception. How did you react to a personal/family crisis such as terminal illness, divorce, family member/close friend with a substance abuse problem, etc? Did you get involved or did you keep your distance? Free write for about 10 minutes to justify why you reacted in that particular way.

#### **B. Bring your entry to class and discuss in small groups.**

## **II. While-Reading**

**A.** Annotate, while reading, those things you like in the behavior of the two main characters, Linda and Wes.

**B.** Identify all characters using a diagram to show what each of them are dependent on.

**C.** Find a way to illustrate visually your perception of the type of relationship among the characters.

**D.** Outline the text and justify your selection.

**E.** Make a map of the whole array of feelings that each character experiences while the story unfolds. If you were to choose only one word to express the pervasive, characteristic feeling of the story, what would your choice be?

### III. Post-Reading

A. Examine the 12 steps recommended by Alcoholics Anonymous (ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, 1955, Paladin Books, pp 59-60). Which of these steps could be used when one thinks of other types of compulsive behavior (overeating, overspending, gambling, etc.)? Share your views with a partner.

#### The 12 Suggested Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

**B.** You are in the streets of New York. You are handed a flier with the Statement of Purpose from Al-Anon. You immediately think of a friend or family who is faced with the problem of alcoholism back in Romania where the Al-Anon is not a living reality. Examine the Statement and jot down the most important elements to present to your friend when back in your country.

Statement of Purpose:  
Al-Anon's Suggested Preamble to the Twelve Steps

The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness, and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.

Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions.

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic. If you identify with some of these statements, it is important to know that help and hope for friends and families of alcoholics is just a phone call away (888-4AL-ANON).

**C.** Imagine you are Edna, and you are considering the possibility of becoming a member of the Al-Anon Family Group that aims to help families of alcoholics. Use the answers to the following questions to role-play in pairs a dialogue between you, as Edna, and the volunteer working for Al-Anon.

### Are You Troubled by Someone's Drinking? Al-Anon Is for You!

Millions of people are affected by the excessive drinking of someone close. These 20 questions are designed to help you decide whether or not you need Al-Anon.

1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Do you have money problems because of someone else's drinking?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you feel that if the drinker cared about you, he/she would stop drinking to please you?
5. Do you blame the drinker's behavior on his or her companions?
6. Are plans frequently upset or canceled or meals delayed because of the drinker?
7. Do you make threats, such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
8. Do you secretly try to smell the drinker's breath?
9. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?
10. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
11. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?
12. Have you considered calling the police for help in fear of abuse?
13. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
14. Do you ever ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking?
15. Have you refused social invitations out of fear or anxiety?
16. Do you feel like a failure because you can't control the drinking?
17. Do you think that if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be solved?
18. Do you ever threaten to hurt yourself in order to scare the drinker?
19. Do you feel angry, confused, or depressed most of the time?
20. Do you feel there is no one who understands your problems?

**D.** Small-group discussion. Talk about which of the 12 steps you think Wes, Edna, and Chef have completed.

**E.** Imagine that Edna, the narrator, performs stage 5 of Al-Anon. (*Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs*). In pairs, write the correspondence going on between the narrator and her daughter, Cheryl,

regarding the 'exact nature' of the parents' 'wrongs.' Should Edna admit to Cheryl that as parents, they feel guilty for the way they brought them up?

**F.** Imagine you are Bobby, Wes and Edna's son. You gave up school and from an early age have chosen to work in the state of Washington in the fields to detach yourself from the life lived under the pressure of a father addicted to alcohol. You have recently found out that your girl friend is worried that you might develop the same dependency on alcohol with age as your father. She insists that you should become a member of Al-Anon as a support group that could protect you from this threat. She thinks you overreact to any criticism and that you are too mean in money matters. You have asked for information from Al-Anon, and they have sent you by mail the following questionnaire to be filled in. Free write for 10 minutes your thoughts after reading the questions by yourself.

#### Did You Grow up With a Problem Drinker?

Alcoholism is a family disease. Those of us who have lived with this disease as children sometimes have problems, which the Al-Anon program can help us to resolve. If someone close to you has, or has had, a drinking problem, the following questions may help you in determining whether alcoholism affected your childhood or present life, and if Al-Anon is for you.

1. Do you constantly seek approval and affirmation?
2. Do you fail to recognize your accomplishments?
3. Do you fear criticism?
4. Do you over extend yourself?
5. Have you had problems with your own compulsive behavior?
6. Do you have a need for perfection?
7. Are you uneasy when your life is going smoothly, continually

- anticipating problems?
8. Do you feel more alive in the midst of a crisis?
  9. Do you still feel responsible for others, as you did for the problem drinker in your life?
  10. Do you care for others easily, yet find it difficult to care for yourself?
  11. Do you isolate yourself from other people?
  12. Do you respond with fear to authority figures and angry people?
  13. Do you feel that individuals and society in general are taking advantage of you?
  14. Do you have trouble with intimate relationships?
  15. Do you confuse pity with love, as you did with the problem drinker?
  16. Do you attract and/or seek people who tend to be compulsive and abusive?
  17. Do you cling to relationships because you are afraid of being alone?
  18. Do you mistrust your own feelings and the feelings expressed by others?
  19. Do you find it difficult to identify and express your emotions?
  20. Do you think parental drinking may have affected you?

**G.** Linda, Chef's daughter, has been a member of Alateen (see below) since she married at 18. Now, at 21, she needs to become the breadwinner of her family in order to support her two-year-old son. Consequently, she has applied for a paid job with the organization Alateen. She has been asked to prepare an induction pack for the young people who seem interested in membership of this support group. The material she has chosen to help her prepare the presentation pack is a questionnaire she herself had filled in three years ago, when she had become a practicing member, alongside some more recent information she has downloaded from the internet about the organization. Write the presentation Linda prepares on Alateen based on this documentation.

### Has Your Life Been Affected By Someone Else's Drinking?

*Alateen* is for young people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. Sometimes, the active drinking has stopped, or the active drinker may not live with us anymore. Even though the alcohol may be gone, and the alcoholic gone or recovering in AA, we are still affected. Many of us have received help from Alateen or Al-Anon. The following 20 questions are to help you decide whether Alateen is for you.

1. Do you believe no one could possibly understand how you feel?
2. Do you cover up your real feelings by pretending you don't care?
3. Do you feel nobody really loves you or cares what happens to you?
4. Do you tell lies to cover up for some one else's drinking or what's happening in your home?
5. Do you stay out of the house as much as possible because you hate it there?
6. Are you afraid or embarrassed to bring your friends home?
7. Has someone's drinking upset you?
8. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking or others' reactions to the drinking?
9. Are you afraid to speak up sometimes for fear it will set off a drinking bout or start another fight?
10. Do you think the drinker's behavior is caused by you, other members of your family, friends, or rotten breaks in life?
11. Do you make threats such as, "If you don't stop drinking and fighting, I'll run away"?
12. Do you make promises about behavior, such as, "I'll get better grades," "go to church," or "keep my room clean" in exchange for a promise that the drinking and fighting stop?
13. Do you feel that if your mom or dad loved you, she or he would stop drinking?
14. Do you ever threaten or actually hurt yourself to scare your parents into saying "I'm sorry," or "I love you"?
15. Do you or your family have money problems because of someone else's drinking?
16. Are mealtimes frequently stressful or delayed because of drinking or fighting?
17. Have you considered calling the police because of the abusive behavior in your home?
18. Have you refused dates because your date may find out about the drinking or fighting?
19. Do you think your problems would be solved if the drinking stopped?
20. Do you ever treat people (teachers, schoolmates, teammates, etc.) unjustly because you are angry with someone else for drinking too much?

If you answered yes to some of these questions, Alateen may be able to help you.

#### PURPOSES OF ALATEEN

Young people come together to:  
 share experience, strength and hope with each other  
 discuss their difficulties  
 learn effective ways to cope with their problems  
 encourage one another  
 help each other understand the principles of the Al-Anon program  
 learn how to use the Twelve Steps and Alateen's Twelve Traditions

#### SPONSORSHIP

Every Alateen group needs an active, adult member of Al-Anon to serve as sponsor. The sponsor is an active part of the group, guiding and sharing knowledge of our Twelve Steps and Alateen Traditions.

#### MEETINGS

Alateen members meet in church halls, school rooms or other suitable places (many times in the same building as an Al-Anon group, but in a separate room.)

#### ALATEEN MEMBERS LEARN:

compulsive drinking is a disease  
 they can detach themselves emotionally from the drinker's problems while continuing to love the person  
 they are not the cause of anyone else's drinking or behavior  
 they cannot change or control anyone but themselves  
 they have spiritual and intellectual resources with which to develop their own potentials, no matter what happens at home  
 they can build satisfying and rewarding life experiences for themselves

#### ALATEEN LITERATURE

Members are encouraged to read [Al-Anon and Alateen Conference-Approved Literature](#) and materials. Written from members' personal sharings, these recovery tools can help young people deal with their problems.

**H.** Al-Anon considers that alcoholism is a family disease and that changed attitudes can aid recovery. If this is the case, discuss in a small group how Bobby and Cheryl could help Linda and Wes in the moment of crisis in which the end of the short story leaves them.

**J.** Compare and contrast the relationship Linda and Wes have with their children vs. Chef's relationship with his daughter and her child. Write a page-long entry (three to four paragraphs) in your dairy with your thoughts on these two case studies.

**K.** Read the following summary of *Chef's House*. Write your own summary to represent your own interpretation of the short story. Statements of disagreement, confirmation or alternative points of view are encouraged.

*Chef's House* shows the relationship between recovering alcoholics and individuals that need to keep in close contact with them.

The two main characters are Wes and Edna. Edna, the narrator, has just left her boyfriend (a recovering alcoholic) to give her ex-husband (a recovering alcoholic too) a second chance.

The two move in with a man named Chef. He also is a recovering alcoholic. Their monthly expenses are low, so Edna does not have to work. Wes and the narrator do not have a telephone and shop for discount items in the store.

This couple is totally focused on each other. This is to keep Wes clean, and it gives Edna a purpose in life. This problem is that they have two grown children that don't want much to do with their parents. This is a definite sign of selfishness from the mother and father.

A problem arises when their landlord, Chef, tells Wes he needs to move out. Chef's daughter, Linda, who is a recovering alcoholic, has decided to move in with her father.

The only option for Chef is to ask Wes and Edna to move out. This sends Wes into a state of depression.

At the end of the story, it is clear that Wes will go back to his drinking, and Edna will find another lost soul to save.

**L.** Read the following excerpts from Carver's story *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Enumerate the various illustrations used by the characters to speak about love manifestations. Free class discussion: provide examples from your life experience or from your reading about ways in which love makes itself manifest.

### Case study # 1

Terri said the man she lived before she lived with Mel loved her so much he tried to kill her. Then Terri said, "he beat me up one night. He dragged me around the living room by my ankles. He kept saying, 'I love you, I love you, you bitch' He went on dragging me around the living room. My head kept knocking on things." Terri looked around the table. "What do you do with love like that?" [...]

"My God, don't be silly. That's not love, and you know it," Mel said. "I don't know what you'd call it, but I sure know you wouldn't call it love." [...]

"Say what you want to, but I know it was," Terri said. "It may sound crazy to you, but it's true just the same. People are different, Mel. Sure, sometimes he may have acted crazy. Okay. But he loved me. In his own way maybe, but he loved me. There was love there, Mel. Don't say there wasn't." [...]

"The man threatened to kill me," Mel said. He finished his drink and reached for the gin bottle. "Terri's of the kick-me-so-I'll-know-you-love-me school. Terri, hon, don't look that way." [...]

When I left, he drank rat poison," Terri said. She clasped her arms with her hands. [...]

“It gets worse,” Terri said. “He shot himself in the mouth. “But he bungled that too.

Poor Ed,” she said. Terri shook her head.

“Poor Ed nothing,” Mel said. “He was dangerous.” [...]

“He did love me though, Mel. Grant me that,” Terri said.

“That’s all I’m asking. He didn’t love me the way you love me. I’m not saying that. But he loved me. You can grant me that, can’t you?” [...]

“What happened?” Laura said.

Mel said, “He shot himself in the mouth in his room. Someone heard the shot and told the manager. They came in with a passkey, saw what had happened, and called an ambulance. I happened to be there when they brought him in, alive past recall. The man lived for three days. His head swelled up to twice the size of a normal head. I’d never seen anything like it, and I hope I never do again. Terri wanted to go in and sit with him when she found out about it. We had a fight over it. I didn’t think she should see him like that. I didn’t think she should see him, and I still don’t.”

“Who won the fight?” Laura said.

“I was in the room with him when he died,” Terri said. “He never came up out of it. But I sat with him. He didn’t have anyone else.”

“He was dangerous,” Mel said. “If you call that love, you can have it.”

“It was love,” Terri said. “Sure, it’s abnormal in most people’s eyes. But he was willing to die for it. He did die for it.”

## Case study # 2

“Well, Nick and I know what love is,” Laura said. “For us, I mean,” Laura said. She bumped my knee with her knee. “You’re supposed to say something now,” Laura said, and turned her smile on me.

For an answer, I took Laura’s hand and raised it to my lips. I made a big production out of kissing her hand. Everyone was amused.

“We’re lucky,” I said.

“You guys,” Terri said. “Stop that now. You’re making me sick. You’re still on the honeymoon, for God’s sake. You’re still gaga, for crying out loud. Just wait. How long have you been together now? How long has it been? A year? Longer than a year?”

“Going on a year and a half,” Laura said, flushed and smiling.

“Oh, now,” Terri said. “Wait awhile.”

She held her drink and gazed at Laura.

“I’m only kidding,” Terri said.

### Case study # 3

“What do any of us really know about love?” Mel said. “It seems to me we’re just beginners at love. We say we love each other and we do, I don’t doubt it. I love Terri and Terri loves me, and you guys love each other too. You know the kind of love I’m talking about now. Physical love, that impulse that drives you to someone special, as well as love of the other person’s being, his or her essence, as it were. Carnal love, well, call it sentimental love, the day-to-day caring about the other person. But sometimes I have a hard time accounting for the fact that I must have loved my first wife too. But I did, I know I did. So I suppose I am like Terri in that regard. Terri and Ed.” He thought about it and then he went on.

“There was a time when I thought I loved my first wife more than life itself. But now I hate her guts. I do. How do you explain that? What happened to that love?”

### Case study # 4

“I’ll tell you what real love is,” Mel said. “I mean, I’ll give you a good example. And then you can draw your own conclusions.” [...] “there’s this old couple who had this car wreck out on the interstate. A kid hit them and they were all torn to shit and nobody was giving them much chance to pull through.”

“I dropped in to see each of them every day, sometimes twice a day if I was up doing calls anyway. Casts and bandages, head to foot, the both of them. You know, you’re seen it in movies. That’s just the way they looked, just like in the movies. Little eye-holes and nose-holes and mouth-holes. And she had to have her legs slung up on top of it. Well, the husband was very depressed for the longest while. Even after he found out that his wife was going to pull through, he was still very depressed. Not about the accident, though. I mean, the accident was one thing, but it wasn’t everything. I’d get up to his mouth-hole, you know, and he’d say no, it wasn’t the accident exactly but it was because he couldn’t see her through his eye-holes. He said that was what was making him feel so sad. Can you imagine? I’m telling you, the man’s heart was breaking because he couldn’t turn his goddamn head and *see* his goddamn wife.”

Mel looked around the table and shook his head at what he was going to say. “I mean, it was killing the old fart just because he couldn’t look at the fucking woman.”

We all looked at Mel.

“Do you see what I’m saying?” he said.

**M.** Read again, in turn, each of the case studies. Write down your personal thoughts, and words/phrases from the text. These can come from a section of the story that struck an emotion or something that confused you. Do not hesitate to allow yourself to free write for this exercise.

**N.** Read the following excerpts from Mika Waltari's novel *The Egyptian*.

Meditate on the types of love and its disastrous consequences as shown in these texts. Write 500 words about your reaction to the message Sinuhe's parents left before they committed suicide. In your group discuss the forgiving and healing power of love. Jot down ideas about possible links between *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, *The Egyptian*, and *Chef's House*.

*The Egyptian* – fifteen books on the life of Sinuhe the physician, c. 1390-1335 BC

Internationally speaking, "The Egyptian" is the best-known Finnish novel; it has been translated into 26 languages and filmed in Hollywood. It was the first of Waltari's many historical novels.

As a newly-born baby Sinuhe is placed in a tarred reed boat and allowed to float down the River Nile. It was the custom in the metropolis of Thebes that in the pharaoh's house of women only his wife was allowed to give birth to a boy child. The wife of the paupers' physician in Thebes finds Sinuhe and raises him as her own son. The boy grows up and becomes a doctor like his foster-father. But fate has other things in store for Sinuhe: he is to travel the world. The beautiful courtesan Nefernefernerfer tricks Sinuhe out of his possessions and honor, and drives him into exile in Syria.

There, Sinuhe makes good as a physician and befriends the pharaoh's ambitious military commander Horemheb. As Horemheb's spy, and driven on by his own restless heart, he sets off to the great countries of his day. He gets to know the rulers of Babylon and Syria and falls in love with Minea, a beautiful dancer. Minea later meets a cruel death as a victim of the Sea God and Sinuhe returns to Thebes with a heavy heart.

Thanks to Horemheb, Sinuhe is made the pharaoh's surgeon. The attempts at religious and social reform of the impassioned pharaoh – in which Sinuhe, too, is involved – serve as the background for Waltari's novel. After great internal and foreign upheavals Pharaoh Ekhnaton is killed. Horemheb succeeds him to the throne and puts an end to the wars.

Sinuhe, who has by now lost his position as a favourite, is expelled from Egypt. In exile Sinuhe, utterly weary of the futility of human life, writes down his life story.

*“You never told me that your father Senmut has a house in the poor quarter near the harbor. The house is worth little, but the ground it stands on lies near the quays, and his furniture might fetch something at the market. I might eat and drink and take pleasure with you today if you were to give me this property of yours – for no one knows what tomorrow may bring, and I must guard my reputation.”*

*“My father’s property is not mine,” I said aghast. “You must not ask of me what is not mine to give, Nefernefernefer.”*

*She tilted her head sideways, watching me with green eyes.*

*“Your father’s property is your lawful inheritance, Sinuhe, as well you know. And further, you never told me that he is blind and that he has entrusted you with the stewardship of his possessions so that you can dispose of them as if they were your own.”*

*This was true, for when my father’s sight had grown dim, he had given me his seal and asked me to look after his property as he could no longer see to sign his name. Kipa and he had often said that the house would fetch a good price and enable them to buy a little homestead outside the city and to live there until the time came for them to take possession of their tomb and start on the journey to immortality.*

*I could not speak, so overwhelmed was I with horror at the thought of deceiving the mother and father who trusted me. But Nefernefernefer half closed her eyes and murmured, “Take my head between your hands – touch my breast with your lips – for there is something about you that makes me weak, Sinuhe, so that I forget my own advantage where you are concerned. All day I will take my pleasure with you if you will make over your father’s property to me, however little it may be worth.”*

*I took her head between my hands, and it was smooth and small, filling me with fever unspeakable.*

*“So be it,” I said, and my voice grated on my own ears.*

*“I am but a weak woman, and men are deceivers – you, too, Sinuhe! My heart is heavy at the thought of it and the tears very near my eyes – for it is clear that you are tired of me. Were this not so, you would never have kept from me that your parents have furnished a fine tomb for themselves in the City of the Dead and have paid to the temple the sum needful for the embalming of their bodies against death and for the things necessary to their journey to the Western Land.”*

*When I heard this, I tore at my breast with my hands till the blood came.*

*“Shall I rob my parents of immortality and their bodies dissolve into nothingness like the bodies of beggars and slaves and those who are cast into the river for their crimes? You cannot demand such a thing of me!”*

*The tears were rolling down my cheeks. Though I groaned in anguish, I went up to her, and she pressed her nakedness against me, saying, “Give me your parents’ tomb and I will whisper ‘my brother’ in your ear and be to you a fire of delight and teach you a thousand things unknown to you to bring you joy!”*

*I had no mastery of myself but wept.*

*“Be it so, and may your name be accursed to all eternity – but withstand you I cannot, so powerful is the spell by which you hold me.”*

*“I Senmut, whose name is inscribed in the Book of Life, and his wife Kipa send this greeting to our son Sinuhe, who in Pharaoh’s house was given the name He Who Is Alone. The gods sent you to us; throughout your life you have brought us only joy, and great has been our pride in you. We are grieved for your sake because you have met with reverses, and we have not been able to help you as we should have wished. And we believe that in all you did you were justified and could not help yourself. Do not grieve for us though you must sell our tomb, for assuredly you would not have done this without good reason. But the servants of the law are in haste, and we have no leisure to await our death. Death is as welcome to us now as sleep its joys many, but the greatest joy of all we had of you, Sinuhe – you who came to us from the river when we were already old and solitary.”*

*“Therefore, we bless you. Do not grieve because we have no tomb, for all existence is but vanity, and it is perhaps best that we should vanish into nothingness, without seeking to encounter further perils and hardships on that our that difficult journey to the Western Land. Remember always that our death was easy and that we blessed you before we went. May all the gods of Egypt protect you from danger, may your heart be shielded from sorrow, and may you find as much joy in your children as we have found in you. Such is the desire of your father Senmut and your mother Kipa.”*