

P A C E M A K E R

World Literature



GLOBE FEARON
Pearson Learning Group

Learning Objectives

- Identify a story's settings.
- Define narrative.
- Identify and understand idioms.
- Recognize details.
- Recognize who the speaker of a poem is.
- Identify alliteration.
- Understand what a poem is.

Preview Activity

Think of a time when you learned something new about yourself. What event led up to this moment of truth? Share this information with a friend.

Theme Preview: Moments of Truth

At some point in our lives we have moments when we must honestly face who we are, who we've been, and who we want to become. At these moments, we are "up in the air." Our lives can change because of what happens next or how we suddenly see something in a new way. These moments can force us to be stronger and more confident. In this chapter, you will read about people whose lives come to a turning point, or moment of truth.

Keys to Literature

setting: the time and place of the action in a story

Example: One setting in this story is a farm in Vietnam.

narrative: a story; a report of what has happened

Example: “The Fly” is a narrative that tells what happens when a moneylender tries to get back money he has loaned.

Did You Know?

Many people borrow money from banks. Banks charge a specific percentage fee each month until the borrower pays off the loan. When a person borrows from an individual, like the moneylender in this story, the rules for paying back the loan are not always clear.

Words to Know

marketplace a place where goods are bought and sold

bamboo a tropical plant with hollow woody stems

witness a person who sees or hears something

clever smart and quick

firmness steadiness; unchangeable manner

explanations answers or reasons that make something clear

chuckling quietly laughing

Genre: Short Story

“The Fly” is a short story. Read more about short stories on page 467 of the Genre Guide.

The Fly

BY MAI VO-DINH, *adapted*

Everyone in the village knew the moneylender. He was a rich and smart man. Having made a great fortune over the years, he settled into an easy life in his big house. The house had a huge garden and was guarded by a pack of fierce dogs. But still he was not happy with all he had. He went on making money by lending it to people all over the county. He charged them a very high rate for the loans. The moneylender was the most powerful man in the area, for many were in debt to him.

One day, the rich man set out for the house of one of his poor farmers. Even though he had been warned many times, the poor farmer could not pay off his debt. Even working himself to a shadow, the poor farmer could barely make ends meet. The moneylender was therefore set on getting his money back. If he



READ TO FIND OUT...

What happens when a rich moneylender tries to trick a young boy?

Predict

What kind of person is the moneylender?

Keys to Literature

The **setting** of a story is where it takes place. In this story, the setting changes a few times. What is the setting here?

Predict

Do you think the moneylender will get his money back?

Think About It

Why do you think the boy tells riddles instead of telling where his parents are?

Think About It

Do you think the moneylender is telling the truth about forgetting the debt? Why?

could not get his money back, he would take some of the poor farmer's best belongings. But the rich man found no one at the farmer's house but a small boy of eight or nine. He was playing alone in the dirt yard.

"Child, are your parents home?" the rich man asked.

"No, sir," the boy replied. He went on playing with his sticks and stones. He paid no attention at all to the man.

"Then where are they?" the rich man asked, rather angrily. Still the little boy went on playing and did not answer.

When the rich man repeated his question, the boy looked up and answered slowly. "Well, sir, my father has gone to cut living trees and plant dead ones. My mother is at the **marketplace** selling the wind and buying the moon."

"What? What in heaven are you talking about?" the rich man commanded. "Quick, tell me where they are, or you will see what this stick can do to you!" The **bamboo** walking stick in the big man's hand surely looked frightening.

Even after he questioned him again and again, the boy gave the same reply. Being very upset, the man told him, "All right, little devil, listen to me! I came here today to take the money your parents owe me. But if you tell me where they really are and what they are doing, I will forget all about the debt. Is that clear to you?"

"Oh, sir, why are you joking with a poor little boy? Do you expect me to believe what you are saying?" For the first time the boy looked interested.

"Well, there is heaven and there is earth to hear my promise," the rich man said. As he spoke, he pointed up to the sky and down to the ground.

But the boy only laughed. "Sir, heaven and earth cannot talk and therefore cannot tell anyone about your promise. I want some living thing to hear your promise."

The rich man caught sight of a fly landing on a bamboo pole nearby. Then laughing inside because he was fooling the boy, the rich man made an offer.

"There is a fly. He can be our witness. Now, hurry and tell me what you mean. How can your father be out cutting living trees and planting dead ones? How can your mother be at the market selling the wind and buying the moon?"

Looking at the fly on the pole, the boy began to speak. "A fly is a good enough witness for me. Well, here it is, sir. My father has simply gone to cut down bamboo. He will make a fence with it for a man near the river. And my mother ... oh, sir, you'll keep your promise, won't you? You will free my parents of all their debts? You really mean it?"

Think About It

Do you think the fly is a good witness? Why?



Think About It

The color of the man's face is compared to a ripe tomato. Why is his face turning red?

Think About It

What lesson does the boy teach the moneylender?

"Rude little devil, that's a pack of lies!" The rich man roared in anger. His face was like a ripe tomato. "The fly was not on my nose; he was on the pole...." But he stopped dead. It was, however, too late.

The great judge himself could not help bursting out laughing. Then the crowd burst out laughing. The boy's parents, too, laughed shyly. The boy, and the rich man himself, also laughed. With one hand on his stomach, the judge waved the other hand toward the rich man:

"Now, now, that's all settled. You, dear sir, have indeed made your promises to the child. Pole or no pole, your talk with this boy did happen after all! The court says that you must keep your promise."

Still **chuckling**, he told all to go.

Meet the Author

MAI VO-DINH (Born 1933)

Mai Vo-Dinh was born in Hue, Vietnam. He moved to the United States in 1960 after studying in Paris. He became a citizen of the United States in 1976. Since then, he has written and translated many books.

Mai Vo-Dinh is known not only for his short stories, but also for his poetry and nonfiction. He is an artist as well as a writer. He has illustrated a number of his own books, such as *The Toad Is the Emperor's Uncle* and *The Jade Song*.



AFTER YOU READ “The Fly”

Check Your Predictions

1. Look back at the answers you gave for the Predict questions. Would you change your answers? Explain.

Understand the Story

2. Why does the rich man come to the boy's house?
3. Who witnesses the promise?
4. Why does the rich man think he has tricked the boy?
5. Name one of the story's settings.

Think About the Story

6. What makes “The Fly” a narrative? What genre is this narrative?
7. What do you think the moneylender has learned from this experience?
8. If you could change the title of the story, what would you name it? Why?

Extend Your Response

Imagine you are a newspaper reporter covering the court case. Make a list of possible newspaper headlines for an article. At least one headline should tell who and what. Another should grab the reader's attention. Work with a partner to decide which is the best headline.