

Before You Read

Seventh Grade

Connect to the Short Story

Think about your first day of school at the beginning of a new school year. How do you feel on that day?

Quickwrite Freewrite for a few minutes about your experiences on the first day of school. What thoughts go through your mind? Do you think your experiences are similar to, or different from, other people's experiences?

Build Background

"Seventh Grade" is about Victor, a Mexican American boy growing up in Fresno, California.

- Fresno is located near the center of the state of California.
- Fresno has a large Mexican American community. Many of Gary Soto's short stories contain characters and settings that reflect Soto's own Mexican American community in Fresno. However, Soto has said that the experiences portrayed in his stories are universal, understandable to people of all backgrounds.

Vocabulary

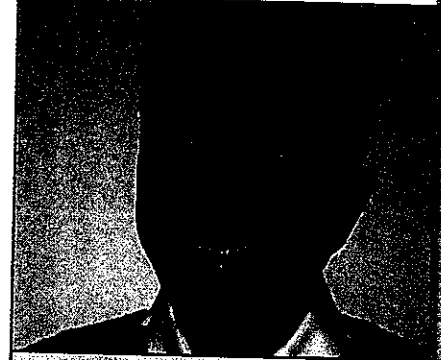
ferocity (fə ros' ə tē) *n.* a wild fierceness (p. 115).

The injured dog snarled and growled with ferocity when anyone tried to approach it.

conviction (kən vik' shən) *n.* a firmness of belief or opinion (p. 116). *The candidates for mayor spoke with great conviction about their plans to improve the town.*

campus (kam' pəs) *n.* the land and buildings of a school (p. 117). *The library was at the north end of the campus.*

Meet Gary Soto



"Writing is my one talent. There are a lot of people who never discover what their talent is. I am very lucky to have found mine."

—Gary Soto

A Meaningful Journey Gary Soto's experiences growing up in a Spanish-speaking neighborhood inspire much of his work. Like his parents and grandparents, Soto labored for a time as a migrant farm worker picking fruit. His love of literature came later, when he went to college. His writing includes award-winning poetry, novels, and memoirs.

Gary Soto was born in 1952.

LOG
ON



Literature Online

Author Search For more about Gary Soto, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u1.

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

In this story, Victor benefits from some unexpected help. As you read, ask yourself, how do other people help us in unexpected ways?

Literary Element Description

Description is writing that conveys an impression of a setting, person, animal, object, or event. Description often includes **sensory details**, which help readers see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the scenes that the author describes. Sensory details help to create **imagery**. For instance, a writer might create a vivid image of a school playground by describing the noisy cries of students playing soccer.

As you read, use the descriptions in the story to visualize, or picture in your mind, the characters, setting, and events.

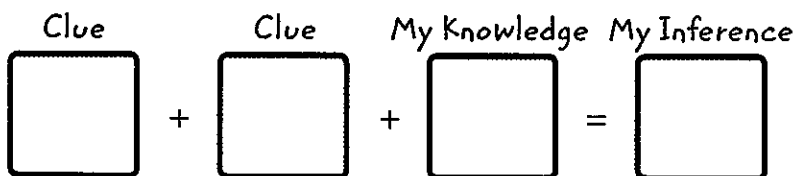
Reading Strategy Make Inferences About Characters

When you **make inferences**, you combine clues in the selection with your own knowledge to figure out what the author does not tell you directly. Making inferences helps you to deepen your understanding of characters and events.

To make inferences about a character, pay attention to

- what the character thinks, says, and does
- how the character looks
- what others say about the character
- how others react to the character

Then use these clues and your own knowledge to understand the character's personality and actions. You may find it helpful to use a graphic organizer like the one below.



Reading Objectives

For pages 112–122

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing description.

Reading: Make inferences about characters.

TRY IT

Make Inferences Your teacher introduces a new student to the rest of the class. The new student's face turns bright red, and he looks down at the floor while he walks quickly to his seat. Why do you think the new student acts this way?



Seventh Grade

GARY SOTO

On the first day of school, Victor stood in line half an hour before he came to a wobbly card table. He was handed a packet of papers and a computer card on which he listed his one elective,¹ French. He already spoke Spanish and English, but he thought some day he might travel to France, where it was cool; not like Fresno, where summer days reached 110 degrees in the shade. There were rivers in France, and huge churches, and fair-skinned people everywhere, the way there were brown people all around Victor.

Besides, Teresa, a girl he had liked since they were in catechism² classes at Saint Theresa's, was taking French, too. With any luck they would be in the same class. Teresa is going to be my girl this year, he promised himself as he left the gym full of students in their new fall clothes. She was cute. And good at math, too, Victor thought as he walked down the hall to his homeroom. He ran into his friend, Michael Torres, by the water fountain that never turned off.

¹ An *elective* is a class that a student chooses to take.

² At *catechism* (kat'ə kiz'əm) *classes*, students learn about the Roman Catholic religion.

They shook hands, *raza*-style,³ and jerked their heads at one another in a *saludo de vato*.⁴ "How come you're making a face?" asked Victor.

"I ain't making a face, *ese*. This *is* my face." Michael said his face had changed during the summer. He had read a GQ magazine that his older brother borrowed from the Book Mobile and noticed that the male models all had the same look on their faces. They would stand, one arm around a beautiful woman, and *scowl*. They would sit at a pool, their rippled stomachs dark with shadow, and *scowl*. They would sit at dinner tables, cool drinks in their hands, and *scowl*.

"I think it works," Michael said. He scowled and let his upper lip quiver. His teeth showed along with the *ferocity* of his soul. "Belinda Reyes walked by a while ago and looked at me," he said.

Victor didn't say anything, though he thought his friend looked pretty strange. They talked about recent movies, baseball, their parents, and the horrors of picking grapes in order to buy their fall clothes. Picking grapes was like living in Siberia,⁵ except hot and more boring.

"What classes are you taking?" Michael said, scowling.

"French. How 'bout you?"

"Spanish. I ain't so good at it, even if I'm Mexican."

"I'm not either, but I'm better at it than math, that's for sure."

A tinny, three-beat bell propelled⁶ students to their homerooms. The two friends socked each other in the arm and went their ways, Victor thinking, man, that's weird. Michael thinks making a face makes him handsome.

On the way to his homeroom, Victor tried a scowl. He felt foolish, until out of the corner of his eye he saw a girl

3 *Raza-style* (ră' ză) refers to the way Mexican Americans or other Hispanic people do something.

4 *Saludo de vato* (să lōō' dō de vā' tō) is a greeting.

5 *Siberia* is a very cold area in northern Asia.

6 *Propelled* means "pushed or moved forward by a force or *as if* by one."

Vocabulary

ferocity (fə ros' ə tē) *n.* a wild fierceness

Description Which words or phrases in this paragraph help you visualize how the models look?

Make Inferences About Characters Why do you think Michael has changed his facial expression?

looking at him. Umm, he thought, maybe it does work. He scowled with greater **conviction**.

In homeroom, roll was taken, emergency cards were passed out, and they were given a bulletin to take home to their parents. The principal, Mr. Belton, spoke over the crackling loudspeaker, welcoming the students to a new year, new experiences, and new friendships. The students squirmed in their chairs and ignored him. **They were anxious to go to first period.** Victor sat calmly, thinking of Teresa, who sat two rows away, reading a paperback novel. This would be his lucky year. She was in his homeroom, and would probably be in his English and math classes. And, of course, French.

The bell rang for first period, and the students herded noisily through the door. Only Teresa lingered,⁷ talking with the homeroom teacher.

"So you think I should talk to Mrs. Gaines?" she asked the teacher. "She would know about ballet?"

"She would be a good bet," the teacher said. Then added, "Or the gym teacher, Mrs. Garza."

Victor lingered, keeping his head down and staring at his desk. He wanted to leave when she did so he could bump into her and say something clever.

He watched her on the sly.⁸ As she turned to leave, he stood up and hurried to the door, where he managed to catch her eye. She smiled and said, "Hi, Victor."

He smiled back and said, "Yeah, that's me." His brown face blushed. Why hadn't he said, "Hi, Teresa," or "How was your summer?" or something nice?

As Teresa walked down the hall, Victor walked the other way, looking back, admiring how gracefully she walked, one foot in front of the other. So much for being in the same class, he thought. As he trudged to English, he practiced scowling.

⁷ **Lingered** means "was slow to move or leave."

⁸ When you do something **on the sly**, you do it so that no one notices.

Dictionary

conviction (kən vɪk'ʃən) *n.* a firmness of belief or opinion

Description Which details in this paragraph appeal to a reader's senses?

Make Inferences About Characters What inferences might you make about Teresa based on what she says and does?

In English they reviewed the parts of speech. Mr. Lucas, a portly man, waddled down the aisle, asking, "What is a noun?"

"A person, place, or thing," said the class in unison.⁹

"Yes, now somebody give me an example of a person—you, Victor Rodriguez."

"Teresa," Victor said automatically. Some of the girls giggled. They knew he had a crush on Teresa. He felt himself blushing again.

"Correct," Mr. Lucas said. "Now provide me with a place."

Mr. Lucas called on a freckled kid who answered, "Teresa's house with a kitchen full of big brothers."

After English, Victor had math, his weakest subject. He sat in the back by the window, hoping that he would not be called on. Victor understood most of the problems, but some of the stuff looked like the teacher made it up as she went along. It was confusing, like the inside of a watch.

After math he had a fifteen-minute break, then social studies, and, finally, lunch. He bought a tuna **casserole** with buttered rolls, some fruit cocktail, and milk. He sat with Michael, who practiced scowling between bites.

Girls walked by and looked at him.

"See what I mean, Vic?" Michael scowled. "They love it."

"Yeah, I guess so."

They ate slowly, Victor scanning the horizon¹⁰ for a glimpse¹¹ of Teresa. He didn't see her. She must have brought lunch, he thought, and is eating outside. Victor scraped his plate and left Michael, who was busy scowling at a girl two tables away.

The small, triangle-shaped **campus** bustled with students talking about their new classes. Everyone was in a sunny mood. Victor hurried to the bag lunch area, where he sat down and opened his math book. He moved his lips

⁹ *In unison* means "all together."

¹⁰ *Scanning the horizon* is looking far ahead to find something in the distance.

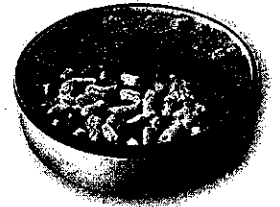
¹¹ When you look for a *glimpse* of someone, you try to get a quick look at him or her.

Vocabulary

campus (kam'pəs) *n.* the land and buildings of a school

Visual Vocabulary

A **casserole** (kas'ə rōl') is food baked and served in a dish.



Make Inferences About Characters Why do you think the girls look at Michael? What might you infer about Michael based on what he says?



as if he were reading, but his mind was somewhere else. He raised his eyes slowly and looked around. No Teresa.

He lowered his eyes, pretending to study, then looked slowly to the left. No Teresa. He turned a page in the book and stared at some math problems that scared him because he knew he would have to do them eventually.¹² He looked to the right. Still no sign of her. He stretched out lazily in an attempt to disguise his snooping.

Then he saw her. She was sitting with a girlfriend under a plum tree. Victor moved to a table near her and daydreamed about taking her to a movie. When the bell sounded, Teresa looked up, and their eyes met. She smiled sweetly and gathered her books. Her next class was French, same as Victor's.

They were among the last students to arrive in class, so all the good desks in the back had already been taken. Victor was forced to sit near the front, a few desks away from Teresa, while Mr. Bueller wrote French words on the chalkboard. The bell rang, and Mr. Bueller wiped his glasses, turned to the class, and said, "Bonjour."¹³ "Bonjour," braved a few students.

¹² Eventually means "in the end" or "finally."

¹³ Bonjour is French for "Good day" or "Hello."

Description How does the description of Victor's actions help you understand Victor's character?

"*Bonjour*," Victor whispered. He wondered if Teresa heard him.

Mr. Bueller said that if the students studied hard, at the end of the year they could go to France and be understood by the populace.

One kid raised his hand and asked, "What's 'populace'?"

"The people, the people of France."

Mr. Bueller asked if anyone knew French. Victor raised his hand, wanting to impress¹⁴ Teresa. The teacher beamed and said, "*Très bien. Parlez-vous français?*"¹⁵

Victor didn't know what to say. The teacher wet his lips and asked something else in French. The room grew silent. Victor felt all eyes staring at him. He tried to bluff his way out by making noises that sounded French.

"La me vava me con le grandma," he said uncertainly.

Mr. Bueller, wrinkling his face in curiosity, asked him to speak up.

Great rosebushes of red bloomed on Victor's cheeks. A river of nervous sweat ran down his palms. He felt awful. Teresa sat a few desks away, no doubt thinking he was a fool. Without looking at Mr. Bueller, Victor mumbled, "Frenchie oh weve gee in September."

Mr. Bueller asked Victor to repeat what he had said.

"Frenchie oh weve gee in September," Victor repeated.

Mr. Bueller understood that the boy didn't know French and turned away. He walked to the blackboard and pointed to the words on the board with his steel-edged ruler.

"*Le bateau*," he sang.

"*Le bateau*," the students repeated.

"*Le bateau est sur l'eau*," he sang.

"*Le bateau est sur l'eau*."¹⁶

Victor was too weak from failure to join the class. He stared at the board and wished he had taken Spanish, not French. Better yet, he wished he could start his life over. He had never been so embarrassed. He bit his thumb until he tore off a sliver of skin.

¹⁴ If you *impress* someone, it means you have a strong effect on him or her.

¹⁵ *Très bien. Parlez-vous français?* means "Very well. Do you speak French?"

¹⁶ *Le bateau* is French for "the boat." *Le bateau est sur l'eau* means "The boat is on the water."

Make Inferences About Characters Consider what you've learned about Victor. What can you infer about the real cause of his embarrassment?

The bell sounded for fifth period, and Victor shot out of the room, avoiding the stares of the other kids, but had to return for his math book. He looked sheepishly¹⁷ at the teacher, who was erasing the board, then widened his eyes in terror at Teresa who stood in front of him. "I didn't know you knew French," she said. "That was good."

Mr. Bueller looked at Victor, and Victor looked back. Oh please, don't say anything, Victor pleaded with his eyes. I'll wash your car, mow your lawn, walk your dog—anything! I'll be your best student, and I'll clean your erasers after school.

Mr. Bueller shuffled through the papers on his desk. He smiled and hummed as he sat down to work. He remembered his college years when he dated a girlfriend in borrowed cars. She thought he was rich because each time he picked her up he had a different car. It was fun until he had spent all his money on her and had to write home to his parents because he was broke.

Victor couldn't stand to look at Teresa. He was sweaty with shame. "Yeah, well, I picked up a few things from movies and books and stuff like that." They left the class together. Teresa asked him if he would help her with her French.

"Sure, anytime," Victor said.

"I won't be bothering you, will I?"

"Oh no, I like being bothered."

"*Bonjour*," Teresa said, leaving him outside her next class. She smiled and pushed wisps of hair from her face.

"Yeah, right, *bonjour*," Victor said. He turned and headed to his class. The rosebushes of shame on his face became bouquets of love. Teresa is a great girl, he thought. And Mr. Bueller is a good guy.

He raced to metal shop. After metal shop there was biology, and after biology a long sprint to the public library, where he checked out three French textbooks.

He was going to like seventh grade. ♣

BQ BIG Question

How is Mr. Bueller someone Victor can count on?

Make Inferences About Characters Why do you think Victor checks out the French textbooks?

¹⁷ When you look *sheepishly* at someone, you show that you are shy and embarrassed.

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. What promise does Victor make to himself about the school year? Why is Victor taking French? Explain. **[Recall]**
2. What happens during Victor's first French class? Support your answer with details from the story. **[Summarize]**
3. Why does Victor give the answer "Teresa" when his English teacher asks him for an example of a person? **[Infer]**
4. In what way might Mr. Bueller be similar to Victor? Explain. **[Compare]**
5. Do you think Victor is a believable character? Why or why not? **[Evaluate]**
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** Were you surprised that Victor could count on Mr. Bueller? Explain your answer. **[Connect]**

TIP

Evaluating

Here are some tips to help you evaluate whether Victor is a believable character:

- Think about Victor's words and actions and your own experiences.
- A believable character is one that is realistic, or one that reminds you of a real person. Does Victor seem as though he could be a student at your school? Why or why not?

FOLDABLES Study Organizer Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.

Connect to Math

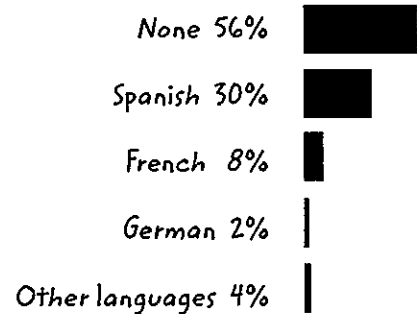
Foreign Languages in U.S. Schools

In schools across the United States, students like Victor study a foreign language. The bar graph shows what percentage of students in the United States took foreign language classes in 2000 and which languages they studied.

On Your Own Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What percentage of students studied a foreign language? What percentage studied a language other than Spanish?
2. Which foreign language was the most widely studied?

Enrollment in Foreign Language Courses



Literary Element Description

1. What are three descriptions that the author provides to help you visualize this story?
2. How would "Seventh Grade" be different without descriptions of characters or setting? Use examples from the story to support your response.

Review: Character

As you learned on page 91, a **character** is a person in a literary work. Some characters are **flat**. Others are **round**. A flat character reveals only one personality trait. A character who shows varied and sometimes contradictory traits is called a round character.

Test Skills Practice

3. Which character in the story is a round character?
A Michael
B Victor
C Belinda
D Mr. Lucas

Reading Strategy Make Inferences About Characters

Test Skills Practice

4. Based on the story, you can infer that
A Michael has many girlfriends.
B Mr. Bueller speaks Spanish.
C Victor only eats tuna casserole.
D Teresa admires Victor.

Vocabulary Practice

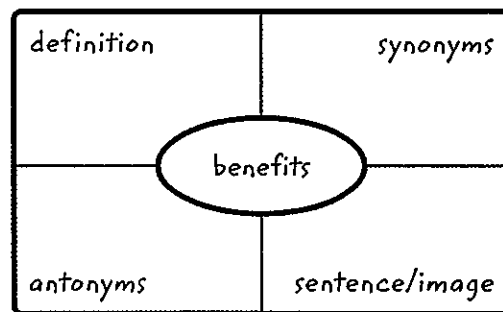
On a separate sheet of paper, write the vocabulary word that correctly completes each sentence. If none of the words fits the sentence, write "none."

ferocity conviction campus

1. Kelsey spoke with great _____ about the need to protect the bird's habitat.
2. The weather changed suddenly, and the wind blew _____ through the trees.
3. Her _____ was heightened when she received her new bicycle.
4. The mother bear roared with _____ as she protected her cub from the hunters.
5. The map of the _____ shows where the library and the gym are located.

Academic Vocabulary

Victor **benefits** from Mr. Bueller's silence after French class. To become more familiar with the word *benefits*, fill out the graphic organizer below.



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Selection Resources For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u1.