

Before You Read

Charles

Connect to the Short Story

Have you ever heard the expression *read between the lines*?

Partner Talk With a partner, talk about the meaning of this expression. Give examples of moments when the expression might be used in conversation.

Build Background

Children entering school must learn to get along with one another, follow directions, and help with classroom activities. In preschool and kindergarten, children become accustomed to a school setting and learn to play together.

Vocabulary

deprived (dī prīvd') *v.* taken away, removed (p. 182). *Ryan was deprived of his snack because his little brother ate it.*

passionately (pash' ə nit lē) *adv.* enthusiastically, intensely (p. 183). *My father passionately cheers for his favorite baseball team.*

simultaneously (sī' mæl tā' nē əs lē) *adv.* at the same time (p. 183). *Two runners reached the finish line simultaneously, so the judges were not certain who had won the race.*

maneuvered (mə nōō' vərd) *v.* guided with skill and design (p. 187). *He maneuvered the car carefully into the small parking space.*

lapses (laps' əs) *n.* interruptions, pauses (p. 187). *Our goalie is on guard for the whole game; he knows that any lapses can result in points for the other team.*

Meet Shirley Jackson



Full of Surprises Shirley Jackson's fiction is filled with strange twists and turns. In most of her novels and short stories, she explores the darker side of human nature. Some of her surprise endings shocked the readers of her day. However, she also wrote humorously about family life, as she does in "Charles."

Literary Works Jackson composed her stories while raising four children. Jackson wrote novels, plays, stories, and books for young people. Shirley Jackson was born in 1919 and died in 1965.



Literature Online

Author Search For more about Shirley Jackson, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

As you read, ask yourself, which moments in this story strike me as humorous or funny? Why?

Literary Element Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is an author's use of clues to prepare readers for events that will happen in a story. Authors use foreshadowing to build suspense and to maintain the readers' interest in a story.

Foreshadowing gives an alert reader hints about what to expect. In "Charles," Jackson uses the characters' actions and dialogue to hint at what will happen at the end. As you read, ask yourself what clues in the story foreshadow the ending. Before you finish the story, try to guess how it will end.

Reading Strategy Draw Conclusions About Characters

When you **draw conclusions about characters**, you use a number of pieces of information to make a general statement about a character or characters in a story.

Drawing conclusions about characters is important because it helps you understand why characters say and do certain things. It's a tool to help you see the larger picture of a story. To draw conclusions about characters, look for specific details about the characters. Then, make a general statement on the basis of these details. For example, a number of story details might lead you to conclude that one character is generous.

As you read "Charles," look for words and actions that help you draw conclusions about the characters. Use a chart like the one below to record details about the characters and the conclusions you draw from the details.

Character	Details About Character	Conclusion

Learning Objectives

For pages 178–189

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

Literary Study: Analyzing foreshadowing.

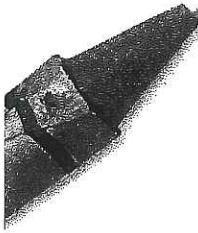
Reading: Drawing conclusions.

TRY IT

Draw Conclusions Think of a character from a television show or movie. Recall details about the character. How can those details be used to draw conclusions about the character and the outcome of the story? Remember that drawing a conclusion is like solving a mystery. You use clues to figure out something that the author does not explicitly tell you about the character.



Charles



Shirley Jackson

The day my son Laurie started kindergarten he renounced¹ corduroy overalls with bibs and began wearing blue jeans with a belt; I watched him go off the first morning with the older girl next door, seeing clearly that an era of my life was ended, my sweet-voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering² character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me.

He came home the same way, the front door slamming open, his cap on the floor, and the voice suddenly become raucous³ shouting, "Isn't anybody here?"

1 When Laurie **renounced** overalls, he rejected or gave them up.

2 **Swaggering** means "carrying oneself in a proud manner."

3 A **raucous** voice is loud and sounds rough.

#1

Foreshadowing What do you learn about Laurie and his mother in this paragraph?

At lunch he spoke insolently⁴ to his father, spilled his baby sister's milk, and remarked that his teacher said we were not to take the name of the Lord in vain.

"How *was* school today?" I asked, elaborately casual.

"All right," he said.

"Did you learn anything?" his father asked.

Laurie regarded his father coldly. "I didn't learn nothing," he said.

"Anything," I said.

"Didn't learn anything."

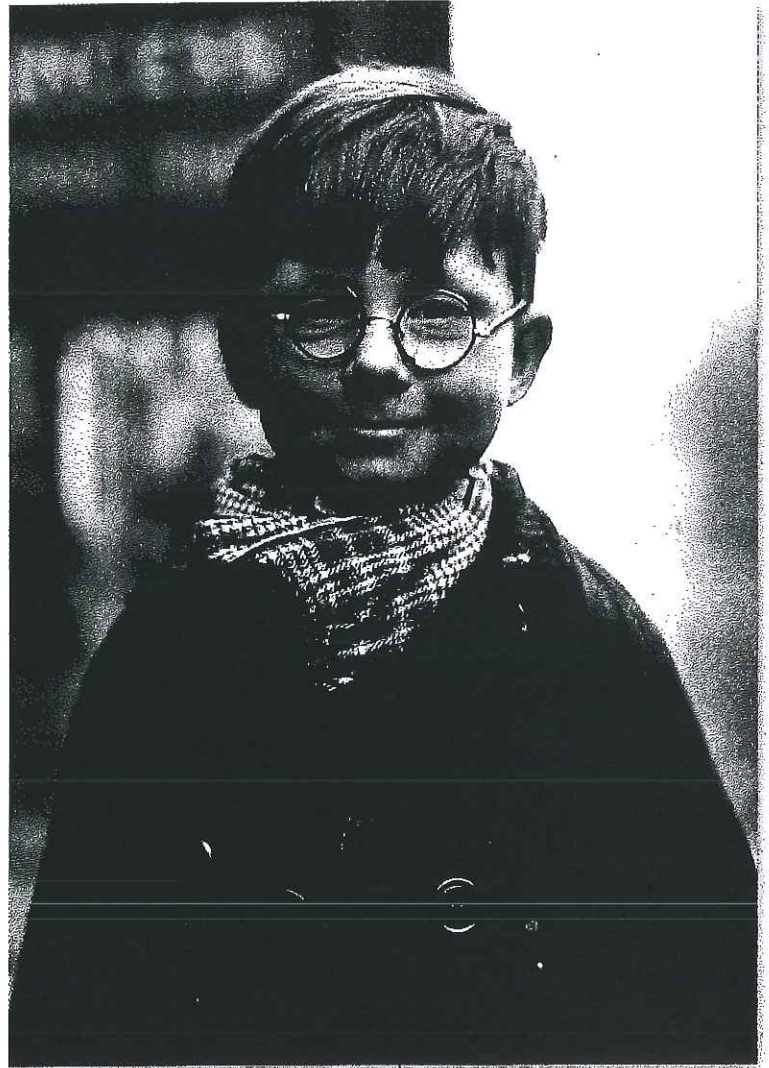
"The teacher spanked a boy, though," Laurie said, addressing his bread and butter. "For being fresh," he added, with his mouth full.

"What did he do?" I asked. "Who was it?"

Laurie thought. "It was Charles," he said. "He was fresh. The teacher spanked him and made him stand in a corner. He was awfully fresh."

"What did he do?" I asked again, but Laurie slid off his chair, took a cookie, and left, while his father was still saying, "See here, young man."

The next day Laurie remarked at lunch, as soon as he sat down, "Well, Charles was bad again today." He grinned enormously and said, "Today Charles hit the teacher."



2 Draw Conclusions About Characters What ideas are you forming about Laurie?

⁴ If someone is speaking *insolently*, he or she is talking in a boldly rude manner.

"Good heavens," I said, mindful of the Lord's name, "I suppose he got spanked again?"

"He sure did," Laurie said. "Look up," he said to his father.

"What?" his father said, looking up.

"Look down," Laurie said. "Look at my thumb. Gee, you're dumb." He began to laugh insanely.

"Why did Charles hit the teacher?" I asked quickly.

"Because she tried to make him color with red crayons," Laurie said. "Charles wanted to color with green crayons so he hit the teacher and she spanked him and said nobody play with Charles but everybody did."

The third day—it was Wednesday of the first week—Charles bounced a see-saw on to the head of a little girl and made her bleed, and the teacher made him stay inside all during recess. Thursday Charles had to stand in a corner during story-time because he kept pounding his feet on the floor. Friday Charles was **deprived** of blackboard privileges because he threw chalk.

On Saturday I remarked to my husband, "Do you think kindergarten is too unsettling for Laurie?" All this toughness, and bad grammar, and this Charles boy sounds like such a bad influence."

"It'll be all right," my husband said reassuringly. "Bound to be people like Charles in the world. Might as well meet them now as later."

On Monday Laurie came home late, full of news. "Charles," he shouted as he came up the hill; I was waiting anxiously on the front steps. "Charles," Laurie yelled all the way up the hill, "Charles was bad again."

"Come right in," I said, as soon as he came close enough. "Lunch is waiting."

Vocabulary

deprived (di prīvd') v. taken away, removed

3

BQ BIG Question

What details in the story strike you as funny?

4

Draw Conclusions About Characters

What conclusion can you draw about the mother's feelings about Laurie?

5

Foreshadowing How would you describe Laurie's behavior?

"You know what Charles did?" he demanded, following me through the door. "Charles yelled so in school they sent a boy in from first grade to tell the teacher she had to make Charles keep quiet, and so Charles had to stay after school. And so all the children stayed to watch him."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"He just sat there," Laurie said, climbing into his chair at the table. "Hi, Pop, y'old dust mop."

"Charles had to stay after school today," I told my husband. "Everyone stayed with him."

"What does this Charles look like?" my husband asked Laurie. "What's his other name?"

"He's bigger than me," Laurie said. "And he doesn't have any galoshes and he doesn't ever wear a jacket."

Monday night was the first Parent-Teachers meeting, and only the fact that the baby had a cold kept me from going; I wanted **passionately** to meet Charles's mother. On Tuesday Laurie remarked suddenly, "Our teacher had a friend come to see her in school today."

"Charles's mother?" my husband and I asked **simultaneously**.

"Naaah," Laurie said scornfully. "It was a man who came and made us do exercises, we had to touch our toes. Look." He climbed down from his chair and squatted down and touched his toes. "Like this," he said. He got solemnly back into his chair and said, picking up his fork, "Charles didn't even *do* exercises."

"That's fine," I said heartily. "Didn't Charles want to do exercises?"

"Naaah," Laurie said. "Charles was so fresh to the teacher's friend he wasn't *let* do exercises."

"Fresh again?" I said.

Vocabulary

passionately (pash'ə nit lē) *adv.* enthusiastically, intensely

simultaneously (sī' mæl tā' nē əs lē) *adv.* at the same time

"He kicked the teacher's friend," Laurie said. "The teacher's friend told Charles to touch his toes like I just did and Charles kicked him."

"What are they going to do about Charles, do you suppose?" Laurie's father asked him.

Laurie shrugged elaborately. "Throw him out of school, I guess," he said.

Wednesday and Thursday were routine; Charles yelled during story hour and hit a boy in the stomach and made him cry. On Friday Charles stayed after school again and so did all the other children.

With the third week of kindergarten Charles was an institution⁵ in our family; the baby was being a Charles when she cried all afternoon; Laurie did a Charles when he filled his wagon full of mud and pulled it through the kitchen; even my husband, when he caught his elbow in the telephone cord and pulled telephone, ashtray, and a bowl of flowers off the table, said, after the first minute, "Looks like Charles."

During the third and fourth weeks it looked like a reformation⁶ in Charles; Laurie reported grimly at lunch on Thursday of the third week, "Charles was so good today the teacher gave him an apple."

"What?" I said, and my husband added warily, "You mean Charles?"

"Charles," Laurie said. "He gave the crayons around and he picked up the books afterward and the teacher said he was her helper."

"What happened?" I asked incredulously.

"He was her helper, that's all," Laurie said, and shrugged.

"Can this be true, about Charles?" I asked my husband that night. "Can something like this happen?"

⁵ Here, *institution* means "a regular feature or tradition."

⁶ The *reformation* in Charles is a change for the better.

6

BQ BIG Question

What details in the description of the father's actions are amusing?



Playground. P. J. Crook. Acrylic on canvas, 116.8 x 132 cm. Private Collection.

View the Art How would you describe the mood of this painting? What elements contribute to the mood?

"Wait and see," my husband said cynically.⁷ "When you've got a Charles to deal with, this may mean he's only plotting."⁸

He seemed to be wrong. For over a week Charles was the teacher's helper; each day he handed things out and he picked things up; no one had to stay after school.

⁷ When the father speaks *cynically*, he is reacting with doubt and disbelief.

⁸ *Plotting* means "planning with evil intent."

"The P.T.A. meeting's next week again," I told my husband one evening. "I'm going to find Charles's mother there."

"Ask her what happened to Charles," my husband said. "I'd like to know."

"I'd like to know myself," I said.

On Friday of that week things were back to normal. "You know what Charles did today?" Laurie demanded at the lunch table, in a voice slightly awed. "He told a little girl to say a word and she said it and the teacher washed her mouth out with soap and Charles laughed."

"What word?" his father asked unwisely, and Laurie said, "I'll have to whisper it to you, it's so bad." He got down off his chair and went around to his father. His father bent his head down and Laurie whispered joyfully. His father's eyes widened.

"Did Charles tell the little girl to say *that*?" he asked respectfully.

"She said it *twice*," Laurie said. "Charles told her to say it *twice*."

"What happened to Charles?" my husband asked.

"Nothing," Laurie said. "He was passing out the crayons."

Monday morning Charles abandoned the little girl and said the evil word himself three or four times, getting his mouth washed out with soap each time. He also threw chalk.

My husband came to the door with me that evening as I set out for the P.T.A. meeting. "Invite her over for a cup of tea after the meeting," he said. "I want to get a look at her."

"If only she's there," I said prayerfully.

"She'll be there," my husband said. "I don't see how they could hold a P.T.A. meeting without Charles's mother."

7 **Foreshadowing** Consider how happy Laurie is to repeat the word. What might this clue suggest about Laurie?

At the meeting I sat restlessly, scanning each comfortable matronly⁹ face, trying to determine which one hid the secret of Charles. None of them looked to me haggard¹⁰ enough. No one stood up in the meeting and apologized for the way her son had been acting. No one mentioned Charles.

After the meeting I identified and sought out Laurie's kindergarten teacher. She had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of chocolate cake; I had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of marshmallow cake. We **maneuvered** up to one another cautiously, and smiled.

"I've been so anxious to meet you," I said. "I'm Laurie's mother."

"We're all so interested in Laurie," she said.

"Well, he certainly likes kindergarten," I said. "He talks about it all the time."

"We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so," she said primly, "but now he's a fine little helper. With occasional **lapses**, of course."

"Laurie usually adjusts very quickly," I said. "I suppose this time it's Charles's influence."

"Charles?"

"Yes," I said, laughing, "you must have your hands full in that kindergarten, with Charles."

"Charles?" she said. "We don't have any Charles in the kindergarten."

8 Foreshadowing From this clue, how do you predict this story might end?

9 Draw Conclusions About Characters How does the teacher's remark change your view of Laurie?

9 A **matronly** face is a motherly, mature face.

10 A **haggard** person looks worn out as a result of grief, worry, illness—or dealing with a boy like Charles.

Vocabulary

maneuvered (mə nōō'vərd) *v.* guided with skill and design

lapses (laps'əs) *n.* interruptions, pauses

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. How does Laurie change when he starts kindergarten? [Recall]
2. How does Laurie describe Charles's behavior? Include details from the story to support your answer. [Recall]
3. Compare Laurie's behavior at home with Charles's actions at school. How is their behavior similar? How is it different? [Compare]
4. What do you discover about Charles's identity? Why do you think Laurie tells stories about Charles at home? Explain. [Inter]
5. **BQ** **BIG Question** Which moments in "Charles" did you think were most humorous or entertaining? Why? [Evaluate]

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.

simultaneously	maneuvered	lapses
deprived	passionately	

1. Mike and I think alike, so it was no surprise that we solved the mystery _____.
2. Karen felt _____ that her work had been recognized at the awards assembly.
3. Today was very hot, so it was a bad day to be _____ of air conditioning.
4. Mai's eyes lit up as she spoke _____ about her favorite hobby.
5. I watched as he _____ the folded paper into the bottle.
6. My computer needs constant power, so any _____ in electricity could damage it.

Academic Vocabulary

Laurie had trouble with the **transition** between preschool and kindergarten. In the preceding sentence, *transition* refers to the move from one type of school to another. We all have transitions in life. List some transitions you've experienced. How did you feel about them at the time? How do you feel about them now?

TIP

Comparing

To answer question 3, think about Laurie's behavior at home and Charles's behavior at school.

- Start by reviewing details about each character. You may use your chart from page 179.
- Make a list of the similarities and differences between the boys. Use the list to help you organize your answer.

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



Literature Online

Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

Literary Element Foreshadowing

1. What clues throughout the story hint at the story's ending? Explain.
2. Do you think that the author included enough foreshadowing so that readers could guess the outcome of the story? Explain your answer.

Review: Characterization

As you learned on page 125, **characterization** includes the methods a writer uses to develop the personality of characters. In this story, Jackson primarily uses **indirect characterization**. She reveals Laurie's personality through Laurie's words and actions, as well as through his parents' reactions to him. In **direct characterization**, an author makes direct statements about a character's personality.

Test Skills Practice

3. Which words best describe Laurie?
 - A honest and open
 - B clever and descriptive
 - C intelligent and well-behaved
 - D quiet and timid

Reading Strategy Draw Conclusions About Characters

Test Skills Practice

4. Which word best suggests the mother's feelings at the end of the story?
 - A shocked
 - B proud
 - C joyful
 - D fearful

Grammar Link

Present Perfect Tense The **present perfect tense** of a verb names an action that happened at an indefinite time in the past. It also tells about an action that happened in the past and is still happening now. The present perfect tense consists of the helping verb *have* or *has* and the past participle of the main verb.

Laurie's parents **have discussed** Charles's behavior in school several times.

Present Perfect Tense

Singular	Plural
I <i>have discussed</i> . . .	We <i>have discussed</i> . . .
You <i>have discussed</i> . . .	You <i>have discussed</i> . . .
He or she <i>has discussed</i> . . .	They <i>have discussed</i> . . .

Practice Using verbs in the present perfect tense, write three sentences about your experiences at school.

Speaking and Listening

Literature Groups With a small group, discuss your own experience of adapting to school or kindergarten when you were young. Compare your experiences to Laurie's experiences in the story. Then, as a group, think of similarities and differences between group members' real-life experiences and Laurie's fictional experiences. Remember to build on the ideas of other speakers and to respect others' viewpoints.