

Comparing Literature

Aunty Misery and Strawberries

BQ BIG Question

As you read "Aunty Misery" and "Strawberries," think about the important lessons that you can learn from the characters and events.

Literary Element Conflict

You've learned that **conflict** is the struggle between opposing forces in a story. An **external conflict** exists when a character struggles against an outside force, such as nature, fate, or another person. An **internal conflict** exists within the mind of a character who is torn between opposing feelings or goals.

A **recurring theme**, or repeated message, appears in different types of literature across cultures. In folktales and myths, conflicts are often meant to teach the reader a lesson. As you read "Aunty Misery" and "Strawberries," look for details that reveal each story's conflict and its theme.

Reading Skill Compare and Contrast

When you compare and contrast two things, you find out how they are alike and how they are different. You may not realize it, but you compare and contrast each time you shop. For example, when you shop for shoes, you look at several pairs before you buy a pair. One pair may be too tight; another may be the wrong color. By comparing and contrasting, you can choose the shoes that are right for you.

In this lesson, you will compare and contrast the conflicts in "Aunty Misery" and "Strawberries." As you read, ask yourself, what lesson does this conflict and its solution teach me about life? Use a comparison chart like the one below to record details about the conflicts and the themes.

	"Aunty Misery"	"Strawberries"
Conflicts		
Solutions		
Themes		

Learning Objectives

For pages 324–331

In studying these texts, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing conflict.

Reading:
Comparing conflict.
Comparing theme.

Meet the Authors



Judith Ortiz Cofer

Judith Ortiz Cofer came to New Jersey from Puerto Rico. She was born in 1952.



Gayle Ross

Gayle Ross shares traditional Cherokee tales. She was born in 1951.



Literature Online

Author Search For more about Judith Ortiz Cofer and Gayle Ross, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

Aunty Misery

A Folktale from Puerto Rico

Judith Ortiz Cofer

This is a story about an old, a very old woman who lived alone in her little hut with no other company than a beautiful pear tree that grew at her door. She spent all her time taking care of this tree. The neighborhood children drove the old woman crazy by stealing her fruit. They would climb her tree, shake its delicate limbs, and run away with armloads of golden pears, yelling insults at *la Tia Miseria*,¹ Aunty Misery, as they called her.

One day, a traveler stopped at the old woman's hut and asked her for permission to spend the night under her roof. Aunty Misery saw that he had an honest face and bid the pilgrim come in. She fed him and made a bed for him in front of her hearth. In the morning the stranger told her that he would show his gratitude for her hospitality by granting her one wish.

"There is only one thing that I desire," said Aunty Misery.

"Ask, and it shall be yours," replied the stranger, who was a sorcerer in disguise.

"I wish that anyone who climbs up my pear tree should not be able to come back down until I permit it."

¹ *La Tia Miseria* (lä tē'ə mē'ze rē'ə) means "Aunty Misery."

Comparing Literature

What is the conflict between Aunty Misery and the children? Begin writing in your comparison chart.

Internal or external?

"Your wish is granted," said the stranger, touching the pear tree as he left Aunt Misery's house.

And so it happened that when the children came back to taunt² the old woman and to steal her fruit, she stood at her window watching them. Several of them shimmied up the trunk of the pear tree and immediately got stuck to it as if with glue. She let them cry and beg her for a long time before she gave the tree permission to let them go on the condition that they never again steal her fruit, or bother her.

Time passed and both Aunt Misery and her tree grew bent and gnarled³ with age. One day another traveler stopped at her door. This one looked untrustworthy to her, so before letting him into her home the old woman asked him what he was doing in her village. He answered her in a voice that was dry and hoarse, as if he had swallowed a desert: "I am Death, and I have come to take you with me."

Thinking fast Aunt Misery said, "All right, but before I go I would like to pluck some pears from my beloved tree to remember how much pleasure it brought me in this life. But I am a very old woman and cannot climb to the tallest branches where the best fruit is. Will you be so kind as to do it for me?"

With a heavy sigh like wind through a tomb, Señor⁴ Death climbed the pear tree. Immediately he became stuck to it as if with glue. And no matter how much he



Dona Rosita Morillo, 1944.
Frida Kahlo. Oil on canvas
mounted on masonite,
30 1/2 x 28 1/2 in. Fundacion
Dolores Olmedo, Mexico
City, D.F., Mexico. ©ARS, NY.

View the Art

#2

Comparing Literature

How does Aunt Misery
trick Death?

2 To *taunt* means "to make fun of in a mean way."

3 Something that is *gnarled* is rough, twisted, and knotty, as a tree trunk or branches.

4 *Señor* (sen yôr') is Spanish for "Mister."

cursed and threatened, Aunty Misery would not allow the tree to release Death.

Many years passed and there were no deaths in the world. The people who make their living from death began to protest loudly. The doctors claimed no one bothered to come in for examinations or treatments anymore, because they did not fear dying; the pharmacists' business suffered too because medicines are, like magic potions, bought to prevent or postpone the inevitable; priests and undertakers were unhappy with the situation also, for obvious reasons. There were also many old folks tired of life who wanted to pass on to the next world to rest from miseries of this one.

La Tia Miseria was blamed by these people for their troubles, of course. Not wishing to be unfair, the old woman made a deal with her prisoner, Death: if he promised not ever to come for her again, she would give him his freedom. He agreed. And that is why there are two things you can always count on running into in this world: Misery and Death: *La miseria y la muerte*.⁵

⁵ *Y la muerte* (ē lä mwer'tā) is Spanish for "and death."



#3

Comparing Literature

Aunty Misery solves one of her own problems but causes problems for others. What are the consequences of her trick?

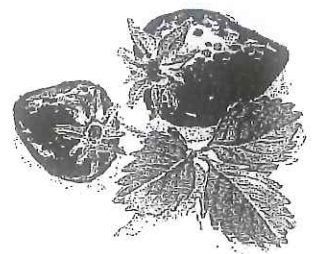
Still Life with Skull, 1895–1900. Paul Cézanne. Oil on canvas. ©The Barnes Foundation, Merion, PA.

*il*lo, 1944.
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Mexico
. ©ARS, NY.

Misery

Strawberries

Retold by Gayle Ross



Long ago, in the very first days of the world, there lived the first man and the first woman. They lived together as husband and wife, and they loved one another dearly. But one day, they quarreled. Although neither later could remember what the quarrel was about, the pain grew stronger with every word that was spoken, until finally, in anger and in grief, the woman left their home and began walking away—to the east, toward the rising sun.

The man sat alone in his house. But as time went by, he grew lonelier and lonelier. The anger left him, and all that remained was a terrible grief and despair,¹ and he began to cry.

A spirit heard the man crying and took pity on him. The spirit said, "Man, why do you cry?"

The man said, "My wife has left me."

The spirit said, "Why did your woman leave?"

The man just hung his head and said nothing.

The spirit asked, "You quarreled with her?"

And the man nodded.

"Would you quarrel with her again?" asked the spirit.

The man said, "No." He wanted only to live with his wife as they had lived before—in peace, in happiness, and in love. "I have seen your woman," the spirit said. "She is walking to the east toward the rising sun."

¹ *Despair* is the complete loss of hope or a feeling of desperation.

#4

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What conflict causes the woman to leave home?

~~Continue to fill in your comparison chart.~~

Internal or external?

#5

Comparing Literature

What does the man realize after the anger leaves him?

The man followed his wife, but he could not overtake² her. Everyone knows an angry woman walks fast.

Finally, the spirit said, "I'll go ahead and see if I can make her slow her steps." So the spirit found the woman walking, her footsteps fast and angry and her gaze fixed³ straight ahead. There was pain in her heart.

The spirit saw some huckleberry bushes growing along the trail, so with a wave of his hand, he made the bushes burst into bloom and ripen into fruit. But the woman's gaze remained fixed. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, and she didn't see the berries. Her footsteps didn't slow.

Again, the spirit waved his hand, and one by one, all of the berries growing along the trail burst into bloom and ripened into fruit. But still, the woman's gaze remained fixed. She saw nothing but her anger and pain, and her footsteps didn't slow.

And again, the spirit waved his hand, and, one by one, the trees of the forest—the peach, the pear, the apple, the wild cherry—burst into bloom and ripened into fruit. But still, the woman's eyes remained fixed, and even still, she saw nothing but her anger and pain. And her footsteps didn't slow.

Then finally, the spirit thought, "I will create an entirely new fruit—one that grows very, very close to the ground so the woman must forget her anger and bend her head for a moment." So the spirit waved his hand, and a thick green carpet began to grow along the trail. Then the carpet became starred with tiny white flowers, and each flower gradually ripened into a berry that was the color and shape of the human heart.

As the woman walked, she crushed the tiny berries, and the delicious aroma⁴ came up through her nose. She stopped and looked down, and she saw the berries. She picked one and ate it, and she discovered its taste

2 To **overtake** means "to catch up with" or "to reach and then pass."

3 A **fixed** gaze is steadily directed and unchanging.

4 An **aroma** is a smell or odor.

#6

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Why do you think the woman doesn't see the huckleberries?

was as sweet as love itself. So she began walking slowly, picking berries as she went, and as she leaned down to pick a berry, she saw her husband coming behind her.

The anger had gone from her heart, and all that remained was the love she had always known. So she stopped for him, and together, they picked and ate the berries. Finally, they returned to their home, where they lived out their days in peace, happiness, and love.

And that's how the world's very first strawberries brought peace between men and women in the world and why to this day they are called the berries of love.

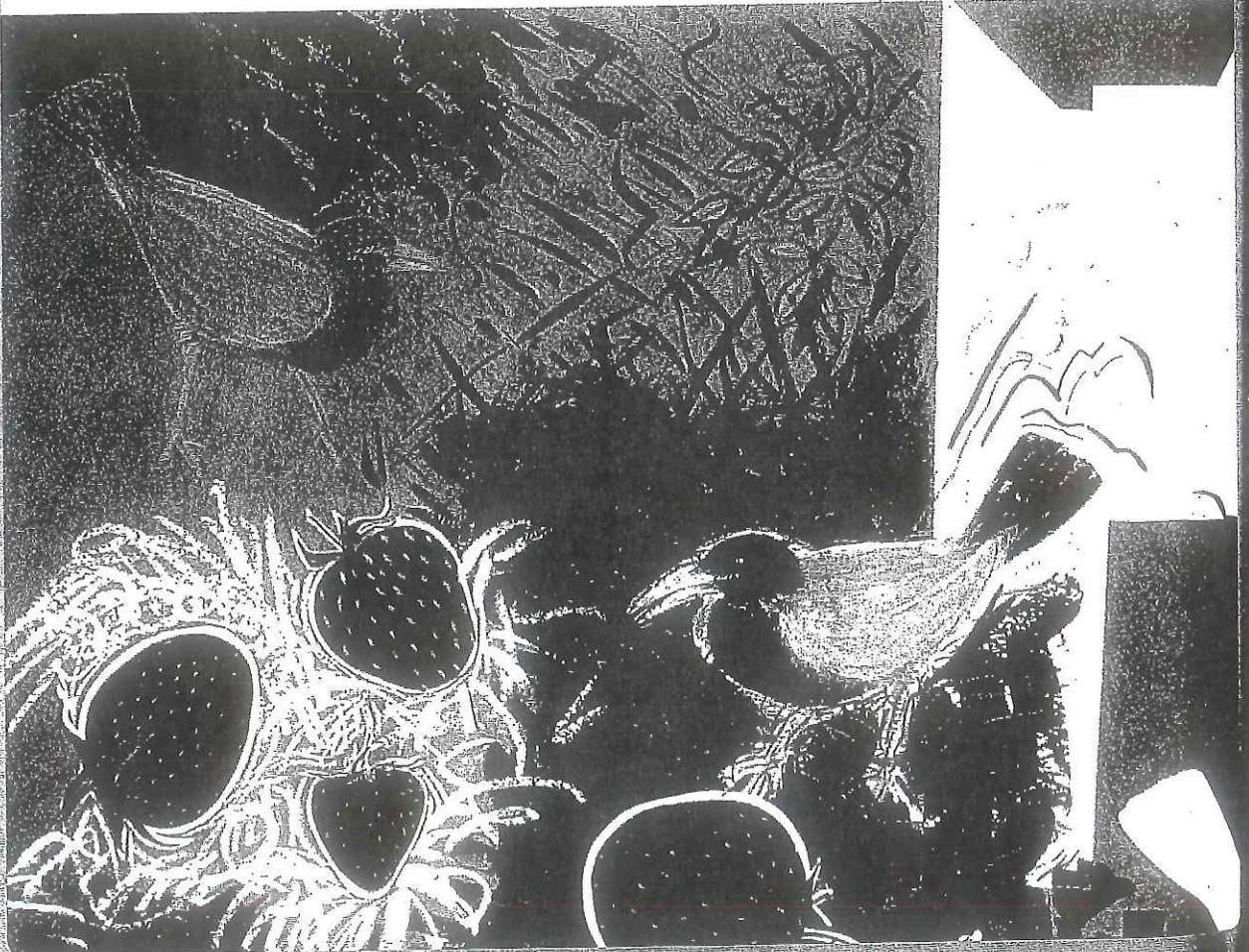
Strawberry Dance, 1983. G. Peter Jemison. Mixed media on handmade paper, 22 x 30 in. Private collection.

View the Art How does the mood of this artwork reflect the mood of the story's ending?

#7

Comparing Literature

How do the berries help solve the conflict between the man and woman?



Comparing Literature

BQ BIG Question

Now use the unit Big Question to compare and contrast “Auntie Misery” and “Strawberries.” With a group of classmates, discuss questions such as

- What is each story trying to teach readers about life and relationships?
- In what way are the life lessons in “Auntie Misery” and “Strawberries” similar to the life lessons in other folktales and myths that you’ve read?
- How can reading folktales and myths help people understand more about life?

Support each answer with evidence from the readings.

Literary Element Conflict

Use the details that you wrote in your comparison chart to think about conflict in “Auntie Misery” and “Strawberries.” With a partner, answer the following questions.

1. In what ways are the conflicts in “Auntie Misery” and “Strawberries” different? Discuss specific details from the selections that show these differences.
2. In what ways are the conflicts in these selections similar? For example, you might think about how the conflicts affect the characters in each story.

Write to Compare

In one or two paragraphs, explain how the conflicts in “Auntie Misery” and “Strawberries” teach important messages about life. You might focus on these ideas as you write.

- Include details about how each conflict begins, whether each conflict is internal or external, and how each conflict is solved.
- Tell how each conflict and its resolution affects the theme of “Auntie Misery” and “Strawberries.”
- Explain how the themes of the stories might help you deal with a conflict in your own life.



Writing Tip

Connecting To think about how the themes might affect your own life, consider whether you might someday face conflicts similar to those faced by the characters. Think about how the themes relate to life, love, and happiness.



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Selection Resources

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