

Before You Read

The Wise Old Woman

Connect to the Folktale

Think about the role an older person, such as a grandparent, has had in your life.

Quickwrite Freewrite for a few minutes about what you have learned from that person. Explain how what you have learned has influenced your way of thinking.

Build Background

Folktales from around the world often follow a similar pattern. They begin with a dreamlike “once upon a time” or “in a land far away” that helps listeners or readers be carried away by the often fantastic events of the story.

- Characters are quickly introduced, and conflict appears early in the story. The characters are often in direct contrast to each other: one is very good and the other is terribly evil.
- Three events, riddles, or wishes often carry the plot along to the frequent conclusion of “happily ever after.”

Vocabulary

haughtily (hō' tə lē) *adv.* in a way that shows too much pride in oneself and scorn for others (p. 10). *“The other team doesn’t stand a chance against us,” Lindsay said haughtily.*

banished (ban' ish d) *v.* forced to leave a country or community (p. 10). *The king banished anyone who went against his ruling.*

commotion (kə mō' shən) *n.* noisy confusion (p. 14). *The musician’s appearance at the stage door caused a commotion among the fans.*

commended (kə mend' ed) *v.* expressed approval of (p. 15). *The teacher commended the student on a job well done.*

undoubtedly (un dou' tid lē) *adv.* without a question, definitely (p. 15). *This film is undoubtedly one of the best I’ve seen.*

Meet Yoshiko Uchida



“Although it is important for each of us to cherish our own special heritage . . . above everything else, we must all celebrate our common humanity.”

Yoshiko Uchida

Writer and Folktale Collector

Yoshiko Uchida was born in California, but her parents taught her to love the folktales from their home country of Japan. As an adult, she traveled to Japan to collect folktales. Japanese culture became very important to her writing.

Literary Works Uchida published fiction, nonfiction, and folktale collections. She once expressed the hope that “all children, in whatever country they may live, have the same love of fun and a good story.”

Yoshiko Uchida was born in 1921 and died in 1992.



Literature Online

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

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

This folktale tells the story of a wise old woman in trouble. As you read, ask yourself, who can the wise old woman count on in a time of need?

Literary Element Narrator and Point of View

In literary works, the **narrator** is the person who tells the story. **Point of view** is the narrator's relationship to the story. In a story using **first-person point of view**, the narrator is a character in the story. The reader sees everything through that character's eyes. In a story with a **limited third-person point of view**, such as "The Wise Old Woman," the narrator is outside the story and reveals the thoughts and feelings of only one character. In a story with an **omniscient point of view**, the narrator is outside the story and may reveal any kind of information, along with the thoughts of several characters.

As you read, ask yourself, how do the narration and point of view affect details of characters and events?

Reading Skill Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships

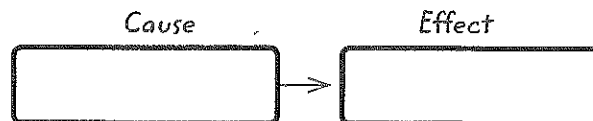
In a **cause-and-effect relationship**, one event or action causes another event or action. For example, a character does something wrong (cause) and then feels guilty about what he or she did (effect). The character may then try to correct the wrong that was done (a new effect caused by the character's feeling of guilt).

Identifying cause-and-effect relationships helps readers understand the reasons why events happen and why characters act in certain ways.

To identify cause-and-effect relationships,

- think about the connection between events or actions and the resulting outcomes
- ask yourself why things happen in the story and how events affect characters
- look for words and phrases, such as *because*, *so*, *since*, *if . . . then*, and *as a result of*, that signal cause and effect

As you read, use a graphic organizer like the one below to keep track of cause-and-effect relationships. Add more boxes, as needed, to show chains of causes and effects.



Learning Objectives

For pages 8–17

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

Literary Study:

Analyzing narrator.

Analyzing point of view.

Reading: Analyzing cause-and-effect relationships.

TRY IT

Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships

Think about a decision that you made in the last day or two. What caused you to make that decision? What was the result? How might things be different if you had made another choice?

The Wise Old Woman

Adapted by Yoshiko Uchida



Many long years ago, there lived an arrogant and cruel young lord who ruled over a small village in the western hills of Japan. "I have no use for old people in my village," he said **haughtily**. "They are neither useful nor able to work for a living. I therefore decree¹ that anyone over seventy-one must be **banished** from the village and left in the mountains to die."

¹ When you **decree**, you make an official rule or decision.

Vocabulary

haughtily (hō'tə lē) *adv.* in a way that shows too much pride in oneself and scorn for others

banished (ban'ishd) *v.* forced a person to leave a country or community

Landscape, Mid-Edo. Ike Gyokurano. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 44 1/8 x 19 3/16 in. Gift of the Asian Art Foundation of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

"What a dreadful decree! What a cruel and unreasonable lord we have," the people of the village murmured. But the lord fearfully punished anyone who disobeyed him, and so villagers who turned seventy-one were tearfully carried into the mountains, never to return.

Gradually there were fewer and fewer old people in the village and soon they disappeared altogether. Then the young lord was pleased.

"What a fine village of young, healthy and hardworking people I have," he bragged. "Soon it will be the finest village in all of Japan."

Now there lived in this village a kind young farmer and his aged mother. They were poor, but the farmer was good to his mother, and the two of them lived happily together. However, as the years went by, the mother grew older, and before long she reached the terrible age of seventy-one.

"If only I could somehow deceive the cruel lord," the farmer thought. But there were records in the village books and everyone knew that his mother had turned seventy-one.

Each day the son put off telling his mother that he must take her into the mountains to die, but the people of the village began to talk. The farmer knew that if he did not take his mother away soon, the lord would send his soldiers and throw them both into a dark dungeon to die a terrible death.

"Mother—" he would begin, as he tried to tell her what he must do, but he could not go on.

Then one day the mother herself spoke of the lord's dread decree. "Well, my son," she said, "the time has come for you to take me to the mountains. We must hurry before the lord sends his soldiers for you." And she did not seem worried at all that she must go to the mountains to die.

"Forgive me, dear mother, for what I must do," the farmer said sadly, and the next morning he lifted his mother to his shoulders and set off on the steep path toward the mountains. Up and up he climbed, until the trees clustered close and the path was gone. There was no longer even the sound of birds, and they heard only the

Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships What has caused the disappearance of old people in the village?

Narrator and Point of View What does the narrator reveal to readers? What does this information tell you about the point of view of the story?

soft wail of the wind in the trees. The son walked slowly, for he could not bear to think of leaving his old mother in the mountains. On and on he climbed, not wanting to stop and leave her behind. Soon, he heard his mother breaking off small twigs from the trees that they passed.

"Mother, what are you doing?" he asked.

"Do not worry, my son," she answered gently. "I am just marking the way so you will not get lost returning to the village."



Standing Beauty, 1851. Ando Hiroshige. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 91.5 x 27.7 cm. The British Museum, London.

View the Art Notice the woman's posture and expression. What qualities might she have in common with the old woman in this story?

The son stopped. "Even now you are thinking of me?" he asked, wondering.

The mother nodded. "Of course, my son," she replied. "You will always be in my thoughts. How could it be otherwise?"

At that, the young farmer could bear it no longer. "Mother, I cannot leave you in the mountains to die all alone," he said. "We are going home and no matter what the lord does to punish me, I will never desert you again."

So they waited until the sun had set and a lone star crept into the silent sky. Then in the dark shadows of night, the farmer carried his mother down the hill and they returned quietly to their little house. The farmer dug a deep hole in the floor of his kitchen and made a small room where he could hide his mother. From that day, she spent all her time in the secret room and the farmer carried meals to her there. The rest of the time, he was careful to work in the fields and act as though he lived alone. In this way, for almost two years, he kept his mother safely hidden and no one in the village knew that she was there.

Then one day there was a terrible commotion among the villagers for Lord Higa of the town beyond the hills threatened to conquer their village and make it his own.

"Only one thing can spare you," Lord Higa announced. "Bring me a box containing one thousand ropes of ash and I will spare your village."

The cruel young lord quickly gathered together all the wise men of his village. "You are men of wisdom," he said. "Surely you can tell me how to meet Lord Higa's demands so our village can be spared."

But the wise men shook their heads. "It is impossible to make even one rope of ash, sire," they answered. "How can we ever make one thousand?"

"Fools!" the lord cried angrily. "What good is your wisdom if you cannot help me now?"

And he posted a notice in the village square offering a great reward of gold to any villager who could help him save their village.

BQ BIG Question

How does the farmer count on his mother? Do you think the mother is counting on her son to spare her?

But all the people in the village whispered, "Surely, it is an impossible thing, for ash crumbles at the touch of the finger. How could anyone ever make a rope of ash?" They shook their heads and sighed, "Alas, alas, we must be conquered by yet another cruel lord."

The young farmer, too, supposed that this must be, and he wondered what would happen to his mother if a new lord even more terrible than their own came to rule over them.

When his mother saw the troubled look on his face, she asked, "Why are you so worried, my son?"

So the farmer told her of the impossible demand made by Lord Higa if the village was to be spared, but his mother did not seem troubled at all. Instead she laughed softly and said, "Why, that is not such an impossible task. All one has to do is soak ordinary rope in salt water and dry it well. When it is burned, it will hold its shape and there is your rope of ash! Tell the villagers to hurry and find one thousand pieces of rope."

The farmer shook his head in amazement. "Mother, you are wonderfully wise," he said, and he rushed to tell the young lord what he must do.

"You are wiser than all the wise men of the village," the lord said when he heard the farmer's solution, and he rewarded him with many pieces of gold. The thousand ropes of ash were quickly made and the village was spared.

In a few days, however, there was another great **commotion** in the village as Lord Higa sent another threat. This time he sent a log with a small hole that curved and bent seven times through its length, and he demanded that a single piece of silk thread be threaded through the hole. "If you cannot perform this task," the lord threatened, "I shall come to conquer your village."

The young lord hurried once more to his wise men, but they all shook their heads in bewilderment.² "A needle cannot bend its way through such curves," they moaned. "Again we are faced with an impossible demand."

2 **Bewilderment** means "confusion."

Vocabulary

commotion (kə mō' shən) *n.* noisy confusion

Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships Why does the lord give the farmer gold?

"And again you are stupid fools!" the lord said, stamping his foot impatiently. He then posted a second notice in the village square asking the villagers for their help.

Once more the young farmer hurried with the problem to his mother in her secret room.

"Why, that is not so difficult," his mother said with a quick smile. "Put some sugar at one end of the hole. Then, tie an ant to a piece of silk thread and put it in at the other end. He will weave his way in and out of the curves to get to the sugar and he will take the silk thread with him."

"Mother, you are remarkable!" the son cried, and he hurried off to the lord with the solution to the second problem.

Once more the lord **commended** the young farmer and rewarded him with many pieces of gold. "You are a brilliant man and you have saved our village again," he said gratefully.

But the lord's troubles were not over even then, for a few days later Lord Higa sent still another demand. "This time you will **undoubtedly** fail and then I shall conquer your village," he threatened. "Bring me a drum that sounds without being beaten."

"But that is not possible," sighed the people of the village. "How can anyone make a drum sound without beating it?"

This time the wise men held their heads in their hands and moaned, "It is hopeless. It is hopeless. This time Lord Higa will conquer us all."

The young farmer hurried home breathlessly. "Mother, Mother, we must solve another terrible problem or Lord Higa will conquer our village!" And he quickly told his mother about the impossible drum.

His mother, however, smiled and answered, "Why, this is the easiest of them all. Make a drum with sides of paper and put a bumblebee inside. As it tries to escape, it will

Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships Why do you think the old woman finds Lord Higa's challenges so easy?

Vocabulary

commended (kə mend'ed) *v.* expressed approval of

undoubtedly (un dou'tid lē) *adv.* without a question, definitely

buzz and beat itself against the paper and you will have a drum that sounds without being beaten."

The young farmer was amazed at his mother's wisdom. "You are far wiser than any of the wise men of the village," he said, and he hurried to tell the young lord how to meet Lord Higa's third demand.

When the lord heard the answer, he was greatly impressed. "Surely a young man like you cannot be wiser than all my wise men," he said. "Tell me honestly, who has helped you solve all these difficult problems?"

The young farmer could not lie. "My lord," he began slowly, "for the past two years I have broken the law of the land. I have kept my aged mother hidden beneath the floor of my house, and it is she who solved each of your problems and saved the village from Lord Higa."

He trembled as he spoke, for he feared the lord's displeasure and rage. Surely now the soldiers would be summoned³ to throw him into the dark dungeon. But when he glanced fearfully at the lord, he saw that the young ruler was not angry at all. Instead, he was silent and thoughtful, for at last he realized how much wisdom and knowledge old people possess.

"I have been very wrong," he said finally. "And I must ask the forgiveness of your mother and of all my people. Never again will I demand that the old people of our village be sent to the mountains to die. Rather, they will be treated with the respect and honor they deserve and share with us the wisdom of their years."

And so it was. From that day, the villagers were no longer forced to abandon their parents in the mountains, and the village became once more a happy, cheerful place in which to live. The terrible Lord Higa stopped sending his impossible demands and no longer threatened to conquer them, for he too was impressed. "Even in such a small village there is much wisdom," he declared, "and its people should be allowed to live in peace."

And that is exactly what the farmer and his mother and all the people of the village did for all the years thereafter.

³ To **summon** means "to send for or request the presence of someone."

Narrator and Point of View

How does the point of view affect your understanding of the farmer's thoughts and feelings?

Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships

What has caused the village lord to change his mind about the old people in the village?

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. Name the three demands from Lord Higa and describe the wise old woman's solutions. [Recall]
2. Why do you think the wise men of the village are unable to solve Lord Higa's problems? Explain. [Infer]
3. What point does this folktale make about people who have power over others? Support your answer. [Interpret]
4. **Literary Element** **Narrator and Point of View** How might this story be different if it were told from the old woman's point of view? [Analyze]
5. **Reading Skill** **Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships** Use your cause-and-effect graphic organizer to help you explain why the farmer goes against the lord's decree. Describe the effect of his decision. [Analyze]
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** Think about how the farmer depends on his mother, and how his mother depends on him. What are the qualities of someone who can be counted on? [Connect]

Vocabulary Practice

Respond to these questions.

1. Whom would you describe as behaving **haughtily**—a friendly person or an arrogant person?
2. Whom would you **banish** from a club—a member who never pays the fees or a member who volunteers to help out with events?
3. Whom would you **commend** after giving a test—a student who scored well or a student who failed?
4. Where would you be likely to hear a **commotion**—a library or a crowded stadium?



Writing

Write a Journal Entry Put yourself in the village lord's place on the day he realizes who is responsible for saving the village. As the lord, what might you think about your previous beliefs and actions? Describe your thoughts and feelings in a journal entry.

TIP

Interpreting

Here are some tips to help you interpret the moral or lesson of the story.

- Start by thinking about the village lord's decree. How do the villagers respond to it?
- Who is responsible for solving the challenges and saving the village?
- What lesson does the lord learn from the experience?

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 GL29763u1.