

## Comparing Characters

# The Three-Century Woman

Short Story by Richard Peck

## Charles

Short Story by Shirley Jackson

# Why do people MISBEHAVE?

### COMMON CORE

RL 3 Analyze how particular elements of a story interact.

No one's behavior is always perfect. When we misbehave, sometimes we do so for a reason—although that doesn't mean it's a good one. In the stories you are about to read, an elderly woman and a young boy misbehave at important milestones in their lives.

**LIST IT** Make a list of ways you've seen people misbehave. Did someone make a face in a yearbook picture? Did someone disrupt a serious ceremony? After making your list, discuss with classmates why you think those individuals may have acted as they did.



## Meet the Authors

### ● TEXT ANALYSIS: CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Some of the most distinctive details in a story are those that reveal a character's traits and **motivations**, or the reasons behind his or her behavior. These details can drive a plot, as a character creates or reacts to events. To figure out a character's motivation, consider story details like these:

- the narrator's direct comments about a character's motivation
- a character's actions and thoughts
- what matters to a character

As you read the following two stories, note what the characters say and do and how their motivations affect the events of the plot.

### ● READING STRATEGY: SET A PURPOSE FOR READING

To **set a purpose** for reading, you choose specific reasons to read. As you read "The Three-Century Woman" and "Charles," find similarities and differences between the two main characters. Fill in the chart after you finish each story.

	<i>Great-Grandma</i>	<i>Laurie</i>
<i>What does each character think, say, and do?</i>		
<i>How do other characters react to each character?</i>		
<i>How would you describe each character's motivation?</i>		

Review: **Make Inferences**

### ▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The listed words help reveal the characters' personalities. For each word, choose the numbered term closest in meaning.

<b>WORD</b>	cynically	insolently	renounce
<b>LIST</b>	incredulously	raucous	venerable

- noisy
- disrespectfully
- sarcastically
- skeptically
- well-respected
- give up



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

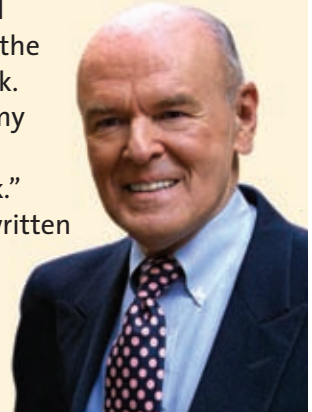
## Richard Peck

born 1934

### Inspired Teacher

Teaching high school English brought out the writer in Richard Peck. As he says, "I found my future readers right there in the roll book."

Although Peck has written novels for adults, he is best known and loved for his young-adult fiction.



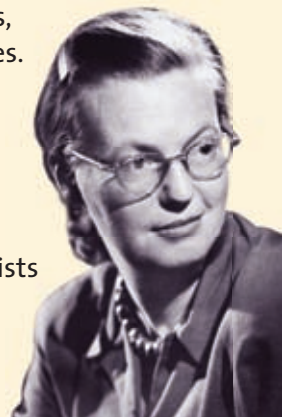
## Shirley Jackson

1919–1965

### Rebel with a Cause

From an early age, Shirley Jackson rebelled against what she considered her wealthy family's selfish lifestyle. Instead of taking part in social events, she would disappear into her journals. After she married, Jackson moved to a small town in Vermont and adopted a much different way of life.

She wrote many novels, essays, and short stories. Jackson's friends and critics described the reclusive author as the "Madame of Mystery," referring to the dark humor and strange twists found in her stories. Sadly, Jackson died at 45 from a heart attack.



Authors Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML7-249

# *The* **Three-Century** *Woman*

Richard Peck

**I** guess if you live long enough,” my mom said to Aunt Gloria, “you get your fifteen minutes of fame.”

Mom was on the car phone to Aunt Gloria. The minute Mom rolls out of the garage, she’s on her car phone. It’s state of the art and better than her car.

We were heading for Whispering Oaks to see my Great-Grandmother Breckenridge, who’s lived there since I was a little girl. They call it an Elder Care Facility. Needless to say, I hated going.

The reason for Great-Grandma’s fame is that she was born in 1899.

10 Now it’s January 2001. If you’re one of those people who claim the new century begins in 2001, not 2000, even you have to agree that Great-Grandma Breckenridge has lived in three centuries. This is her claim to fame.

We waited for a light to change along by Northbrook Mall, and I gazed fondly over at it. Except for the Multiplex, it was closed because of New Year’s Day. I have a severe mall habit. But I’m fourteen, and the mall is the place without homework. Aunt Gloria’s voice filled the car. **A**

20 “If you take my advice,” she told Mom, “you’ll keep those Whispering Oaks people from letting the media in to interview Grandma. Interview her my foot! Honestly. She doesn’t even know where she is, let alone how many centuries she’s lived in. The poor old soul. Leave her in peace. She’s already got one foot in the—”

“Gloria, your trouble is you have no sense of history.” Mom gunned across the intersection. “You got a C in History.”

“I was sick a lot that year,” Aunt Gloria said.

“Sick of history,” Mom murmured.

## Analyze Visuals ▶

What can you **infer** about the personality of the woman in the red hat on the basis of her appearance?

## **A** CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Reread lines 14–17. What do you learn about the narrator here?



“I heard that,” Aunt Gloria said.

They bickered on, but I tuned them out. Then when we turned in at Whispering Pines, a sound truck from IBC-TV was blocking the drive.

30 “Good grief,” Mom murmured. “TV.”

“I told you,” Aunt Gloria said, but Mom switched her off. She parked in a frozen rut.

“I’ll wait in the car,” I said. “I have homework.”

“Get out of the car,” Mom said.

**I**f you get so old you have to be put away, Whispering Oaks isn’t that bad. It smells all right, and a Christmas tree glittered in the lobby.

A real tree. On the other hand, you have to push a red button to unlock the front door. I guess it’s to keep the inmates from escaping, though Great-Grandma Breckenridge wasn’t going anywhere and hadn’t for

40 twenty years.

When we got to her wing, the hall was full of camera crews and a woman from the suburban newspaper with a notepad.

Mom sighed. It was like that first day of school when you think you’ll be okay until the teachers learn your name. Stepping over a cable, we stopped at Great-Grandma’s door, and they were on to us.

“Who are you people to Mrs. Breckenridge?” the newspaperwoman said. “I want names.”

These people were seriously pushy. And the TV guy was wearing more makeup than Mom. It dawned on me that they couldn’t get into Great-

50 Grandma’s room without her permission. Mom turned on them. **B**

“Listen, you’re not going to be interviewing my grandmother,” she said in a quiet bark. “I’ll be glad to tell you anything you want to know about her, but you’re not going in there. She’s got nothing to say, and . . . she needs a lot of rest.”

“Is it Alzheimer’s?”<sup>1</sup> the newswoman asked. “Because we’re thinking Alzheimer’s.”

“Think what you want,” Mom said. “But this is as far as you get. And you people with the camera and the light, you’re not going in there either. You’d scare her to death, and then I’d sue the pants off you.” **C**

60 They pulled back.

But a voice came wavering out of Great-Grandma’s room. Quite an eerie, echoing voice.

“Let them in!” the voice said.

### Language Coach

**Homonyms** Words that have the same spelling and sound but have different meanings are called homonyms. In line 41, the word *wing* means “a structure connected to the side of a main building.” What other meaning do you know for *wing*?

### **B** CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Reread lines 41–50. The narrator characterizes the news people as “seriously pushy.” Which of their actions or words led to this description?

### **C** CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Reread lines 51–59. What do you learn about the narrator’s mother from how she talks to the reporters?

1. **Alzheimer’s** (älts’hi-mërz): a disease of the brain that causes confusion and may lead to total loss of memory.

It had to be Great-Grandma Breckenridge. Her roommate had died. “Good grief,” Mom murmured, and the press surged forward.

Mom and I went in first, and our eyes popped. Great-Grandma was usually flat out in the bed, dozing, with her teeth in a glass and a book in her hand. Today she was bright-eyed and propped up. She wore a fuzzy pink bed jacket. A matching bow was stuck in what remained of her hair.

70 “Oh for pity’s sake,” Mom murmured. “They’ve got her done up like a Barbie doll.”

Great-Grandma peered from the bed at Mom. “And who are you?” she asked.

“I’m Ann,” Mom said carefully. “This is Megan,” she said, meaning me.

“That’s right,” Great-Grandma said. “At least you know who you are. Plenty around this place don’t.”

The guy with the camera on his shoulder barged in. The other guy turned on a blinding light.

Great-Grandma blinked. In the glare we noticed she wore a trace of  
80 lipstick. The TV anchor elbowed the woman reporter aside and stuck a mike in Great-Grandma’s face. Her claw hand came out from under the covers and tapped it.

“Is this thing on?” she inquired.

“Yes, ma’am,” the TV anchor said in his broadcasting voice. “Don’t you worry about all this modern technology. We don’t understand half of it ourselves.” He gave her his big, five-thirty news smile and settled on the edge of her bed. There was room for him. She was tiny. **D**

“We’re here to congratulate you for having lived in three centuries—for being a Three-Century Woman! A great achievement.”

90 Great-Grandma waved a casual claw. “Nothing to it,” she said. “You sure this mike’s on? Let’s do this in one take.”

The cameraman snorted and moved in for a closer shot. Mom stood still as a statue, wondering what was going to come out of Great-Grandma’s mouth next. **E**

“Mrs. Breckenridge,” the anchor said, “to what do you attribute your long life?”

“I was only married once,” Great-Grandma said. “And he died young.”

The anchor stared. “Ah. And anything else?”

“Yes. I don’t look back. I live in the present.”

100 The camera panned around the room. This was all the present she had, and it didn’t look like much.

“You live for the present,” the anchor said, looking for an angle, “even now?”

**D CHARACTER MOTIVATION**

Why is the TV anchor being so friendly?

**E MAKE INFERENCES**

Reread lines 77–94. How do you think Megan feels about the reporters?

Great-Grandma nodded. “Something’s always happening. Last night I fell off the bed pan.”

Mom groaned.

The cameraman pulled in for a tighter shot. The anchor seemed to search his mind. You could tell he thought he was a great interviewer, though he had no sense of humor. A tiny smile played around Great-  
110 Grandma’s wrinkled lips.

“But you’ve lived through amazing times, Mrs. Breckenridge. And you never think back about them?” **F**

Great-Grandma stroked her chin and considered. “You mean you want to hear something interesting? Like how I lived through the San Francisco earthquake—the big one of oh-six?”

Beside me, Mom stirred. We were crowded over by the dead lady’s bed. “You survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake?” the anchor said.

Great-Grandma gazed at the ceiling, lost in thought.

“I’d have been about seven years old. My folks and I were staying at  
120 that big hotel. You know the one. I slept in a cot at the foot of their bed. In the middle of the night, that room gave a shake, and the chiffonier walked right across the floor. You know what chiffonier is?”

“A chest of drawers?” the anchor said.

“Close enough,” Great-Grandma said. “And the pictures flapped on the walls. We had to walk down twelve flights because the elevators didn’t work. When we got outside, the streets were ankle-deep in broken glass. You never saw such a mess in your life.”

Mom nudged me and hissed: “She’s never been to San Francisco. She’s never been west of Denver. I’ve heard her say so.”

130 “Incredible!” the anchor said.

“Truth’s stranger than fiction,” Great-Grandma said, smoothing her sheet.

“And you never think back about it?”

Great-Grandma shrugged her little fuzzy pink shoulders. “I’ve been through too much. I don’t have time to remember it all. I was on the Hindenburg when it blew up, you know.”

Mom moaned, and the cameraman was practically standing on his head for a close-up.

“The Hindenburg?”

140 “That big gas bag the Germans built to fly over the Atlantic Ocean. It was called a zeppelin. Biggest thing you ever saw—five city blocks long. It was in May of 1937, before your time. You wouldn’t remember. My husband and I were coming back from Europe on it. No, wait a minute.”

Great-Grandma cocked her head and pondered for the camera.

#### **F** MAKE INFERENCES

Why do you think the reporter wants Great-Grandma to talk about her memories?

#### **S** SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



On April 18, 1906, an earthquake devastated San Francisco, California. It is still considered one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States.

“My husband was dead by then. It was some other man. Anyway, the two of us were coming back on the Hindenburg. It was smooth as silk. You didn’t know you were moving. When we flew in over New York, they stopped the ball game at Yankee Stadium to see us passing overhead.”

Great-Grandma paused, caught up in memories.

“And then the Hindenburg exploded,” the anchor said, prompting her.

150 She nodded. “We had no complaints about the trip till then. The luggage was all stacked, and we were coming in at Lakehurst, New Jersey. I was wearing my beige coat—beige or off-white, I forget. Then whoosh! The gondola<sup>2</sup> heated up like an oven, and people peeled out of the windows. We hit the ground and bounced. When we hit again, the door fell off, and I walked out and kept going. When they caught up with me in the parking lot, they wanted to put me in the hospital. I looked down and thought I was wearing a lace dress. The fire had about burned up my coat. And I lost a shoe.”

“Fantastic!” the anchor breathed. “What detail!” Behind him the  
160 woman reporter was scribbling away on her pad.

“Never,” Mom muttered. “Never in her life.”

“Ma’am, you are living history!” the anchor said. “In your sensational span of years you’ve survived two great disasters!”

“Three.” Great-Grandma patted the bow on her head. “I told you I’d been married.”

“And before we leave this **venerable** lady,” the anchor said, flashing a smile for the camera, “we’ll ask Mrs. Breckenridge if she has any predictions for this new twenty-first century ahead of us here in the Dawn of the Millennium.”

170 “Three or four predictions,” Great-Grandma said, and paused again, stretching out her airtime. “Number one, taxes will be higher. Number two, it’s going to be harder to find a place to park. And number three, a whole lot of people are going to live as long as I have, so get ready for us.”

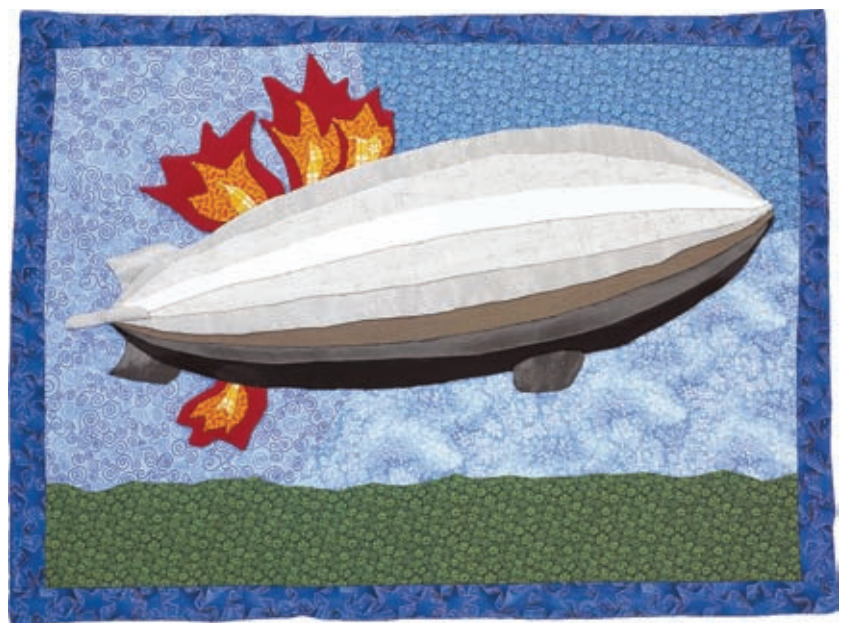
180 “And with those wise words,” the anchor said, easing off the bed, “we leave Mrs. Breck—”

**venerable**

(vēn’ər-ə-bəl) *adj.*  
deserving respect  
because of age,  
character, or importance

▼ **Analyze  
Visuals**

What do you notice  
about the fabric  
patterns used in this  
quilt of the Hindenburg?



2. **gondola** (gōn’dl-ə): a car that hangs under an airship and contains equipment and controls.

“And one more prediction,” she said. “TV’s on the way out. Your network ratings are already in the basement. It’s all websites now. Son, I predict you’ll be looking for work.”

And that was it. The light went dead. The anchor, looking shaken, followed his crew out the door. When TV’s done with you, they’re done with you. “Is that a wrap?” Great-Grandma asked.

But now the woman from the suburban paper was moving in on her. “Just a few more questions, Mrs. Breckenridge.”

190 “Where you from?” Great-Grandma blinked pink-eyed at her.

“*The Glenview Weekly Shopper.*”

“You bring a still photographer with you?” Great-Grandma asked.

“Well, no.”

“And you never learned shorthand either, did you?”

“Well . . . no.”

“Honey, I only deal with professionals. There’s the door.”

**S**o then it was just Mom and Great-Grandma and I in the room. Mom planted a hand on her hip. “Grandma. Number one, you’ve never been to San Francisco. And number two, you never *saw* one of  
200 those zeppelin things.”

Great-Grandma shrugged. “No, but I can read.” She nodded to the pile of books on her nightstand with her spectacles folded on top. “You can pick up all that stuff in books.”

“And number three,” Mom said. “Your husband didn’t die young. I can *remember* Grandpa Breckenridge.”

“It was that TV dude in the five-hundred-dollar suit who set me off,” Great-Grandma said. “He dyes his hair, did you notice? He made me mad, and it put my nose out of joint.<sup>3</sup> He didn’t notice I’m still here. He thought I was nothing but my memories. So I gave him some.”

210 Now Mom and I stood beside her bed.

“I’ll tell you something else,” Great-Grandma said. “And it’s no lie.”

We waited, holding our breath to hear. Great-Grandma Breckenridge was pointing her little old bent finger right at me. “You, Megan,” she said. “Once upon a time, I was your age. How scary is that?”

Then she hunched up her little pink shoulders and winked at me. She grinned and I grinned. She was just this little withered-up leaf of a lady in the bed. But I felt like giving her a kiss on her little wrinkled cheek, so I did.

“I’ll come to see you more often,” I told her. **G**

“Call first,” she said. “I might be busy.” Then she dozed. 

## VISUAL VOCABULARY



**spectacles**  
(spĕk'tə-kəls) *n.*  
eyeglasses

## **G** CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Which actions, thoughts, or words reveal that Megan has changed her opinion of Great-Grandma?

3. **put my nose out of joint:** got me into a bad mood.

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** Where does Great-Grandma live?
2. **Recall** Why are the reporters interviewing Great-Grandma?

## Text Analysis

3. **Examine the Main Character** How would you describe Great-Grandma to someone who hasn't read "The Three-Century Woman"?
4. **Analyze Character Motivation** What character trait might be Great-Grandma's motivation for making up the stories?
5. **Make Inferences** Why do you think the narrator's mother doesn't reveal what she knows about Great-Grandma to the reporters?
6. **Evaluate the Main Character** In line 99, Great-Grandma says, "I don't look back. I live in the present." Is this true? Support your opinion with examples from the story.
7. **Make Judgments** Skim "The Three-Century Woman" and look for examples where each of the characters misbehaves. Who misbehaves the most in this story?

## Comparing Characters

8. **Set a Purpose for Reading** Now that you know more about Great-Grandma, start filling in your chart. Add information that helps you understand Great-Grandma's character.

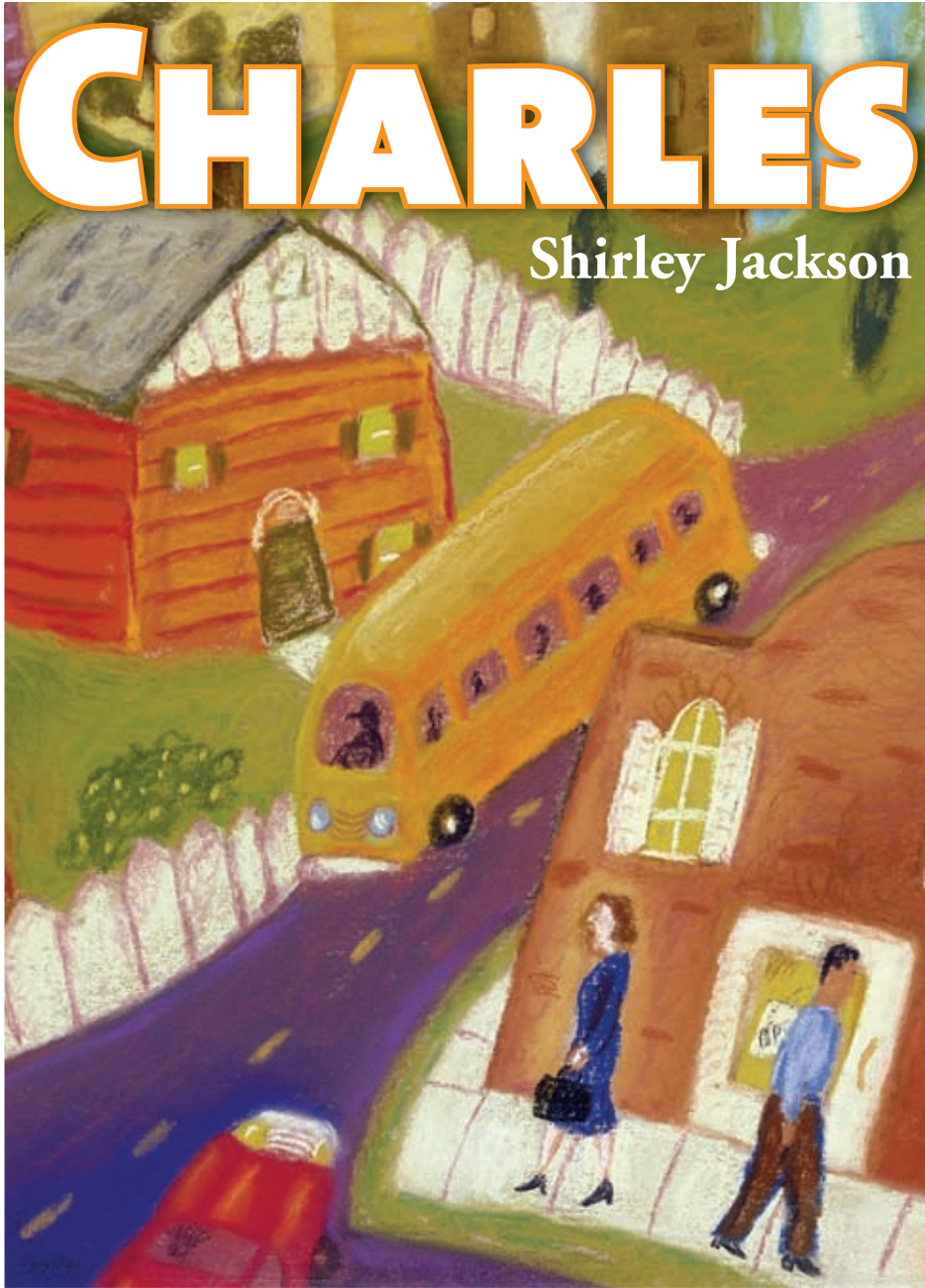
	<i>Great-Grandma</i>	<i>Laurie</i>
<i>What does each character think, say, and do?</i>	<i>She makes up stories for the news anchor.</i>	
<i>How do other characters react to each character?</i>		
<i>How would you describe each character's motivation?</i>		



RL.3 Analyze how particular elements of a story interact.

# CHARLES

Shirley Jackson



## ◀ Analyze Visuals

Make an **inference** about what kind of people live in this neighborhood. What details support your inference?

**T**he day my son Laurie started kindergarten he **renounced** 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, swaggering character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave goodbye to me. **A**

**renounce** (rĭ-nouns') v.  
to give up

### **A** CHARACTER MOTIVATION

What does the narrator imply about how and why Laurie's personality has changed recently?

He came home the same way, the front door slamming open, his cap on the floor, and the voice suddenly become **raucous** shouting, “Isn’t anybody *here*?”

10 At lunch he spoke **insolently** 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.

20 “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.”

“Good heavens,” I said, mindful of the Lord’s name, “I suppose he got spanked again?”

30 “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. **B**

“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 onto the head of a little girl and made her bleed, and the teacher  
40 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.”

**raucous** (rō’kəs) *adj.*  
loud and harsh  
sounding

**insolently**  
(ĩn’sə-lənt-lē) *adv.*  
boldly and insultingly

COMMON CORE RL.3

**B CHARACTER MOTIVATION**

Sometimes a character’s **motivation** is directly stated in the story. Other times you must make inferences that are based on story information. Reread lines 7–33. Describe how Laurie treats his parents. How might Charles’s behavior be affecting Laurie’s actions in the story?

**O**n 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.

50 “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.”

“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.”

60 “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 rubbers<sup>1</sup> 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.” **C**

70 “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.

80 “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.

### Language Coach

**Homophones** Words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings are called homophones. In line 53, the word *through* means “in one side and out the other side of.” Turn to page 259. In line 42, what is a homophone for *through* that means “tossed”?

### **C** CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Why do you think Laurie’s mother wanted to meet Charles’s mother?

1. **rubbers**: low-cut overshoes once commonly worn when it rained.

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.

**W**ith the third week of kindergarten Charles was an institution in our family;<sup>2</sup> 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 the telephone and a bowl of flowers off the table, said, after the first minute, “Looks like Charles.” **D**

During the third and fourth weeks it looked like a reformation 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.”

100 “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?”

“Wait and see,” my husband said **cynically**. “When you’ve got a Charles to deal with, this may mean he’s only plotting.” 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.

“The PTA meeting’s next week again,” I told my husband one evening.

“I’m going to find Charles’s mother there.”

110 “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.

120 “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*.” **E**

“What happened to Charles?” my husband asked.

“Nothing,” Laurie said. “He was passing out the crayons.”

### **D CHARACTER MOTIVATION**

Reread lines 88–93.

Why does Laurie’s family call certain actions “being a Charles”?

### **incredulously**

(ĭn-křĕj’ə-lĕs-lĕ) *adv.*

in a way that shows doubt or disbelief

### **cynically** (sĭn’ĭ-kĕl-lĕ)

*adv.* in a way that shows mistrust in the motives of others

### **E MAKE INFERENCES**

Reread lines 112–121, paying close attention to how Laurie describes Charles’s antics. How does Laurie seem to feel about Charles?

2. **an institution in our family:** something that has become a significant part of family life.

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.

**M**y husband came to the door with me that evening as I set out for the PTA meeting. “Invite her over for a cup of tea after the meeting,” he said. “I want to get a look at her.”

130 “If only she’s there,” I said prayerfully.

“She’ll be there,” my husband said. “I don’t see how they could hold a PTA meeting without Charles’s mother.”

At the meeting I sat restlessly, scanning each comfortable matronly face, trying to determine which one hid the secret of Charles. None of them looked to me haggard 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.

140 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?”

150 “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.”  **F**

### Language Coach

**Etymology** The history of a word is its etymology. The word *kindergarten* in line 137 originates from the German language. *Kinder* is the German word for “children”; *garten* is the German word for “garden.” What do you think is the meaning of the combined word *kindergarten*?

### **F** MAKE INFERENCES

Who is Charles?

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** Who is the narrator of the story?
2. **Recall** Reread lines 25–45. Why does Laurie’s mother think kindergarten is “unsettling” for Laurie?
3. **Clarify** According to Laurie, do the other students tend to side with Charles or the teacher?



RL.3 Analyze how particular elements of a story interact.

## Text Analysis

4. **Examine Character Motivation** Why does Laurie blame Charles for what were really his actions?
5. **Make Inferences** Why doesn’t Laurie’s mother realize that he is Charles?
6. **Analyze Character Motivation** Why do you think Laurie misbehaves? Support your opinion with details from the story.

## Comparing Characters

7. **Set a Purpose for Reading** Now that you have read the second short story, finish filling in your chart. Add the final questions and answer them.

	<i>Great-Grandma</i>	<i>Laurie</i>
<i>What does each character think, say, and do?</i>	<i>She makes up stories for the news anchor.</i>	
<i>How do other characters react to each character?</i>		
<i>How would you describe each character’s motivation?</i>		
<i>In what ways are the characters similar? In what ways are they different?</i>		

### Why do people MISBEHAVE?

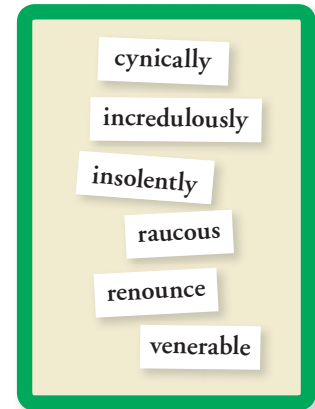
Refer to the list you made of people’s misbehavior. If you made a list of the top five misbehaving people, would any of the characters from “The Three-Century Woman” or “Charles” make your list? Give reasons for your choices.

## Vocabulary in Context

### ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Show that you understand the boldfaced words. Decide if each statement is *true* or *false*.

1. At a **raucous** party, most guests sit quietly and talk.
2. You will most likely get in trouble if you speak **insolently** to the principal.
3. A **venerable** individual is usually between the ages of 9 and 12.
4. Dressing **cynically** is a good way to be safe on a long hike.
5. If you **renounce** your bad habits, you plan to continue them.
6. People respond **incredulously** to things they do not believe.



### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• analyze • aware • develop • react • respond

Should Laurie’s parents have been more **aware** of what was really happening at school? Write an explanation for their behavior. Include at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words in your opinion.

### VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN ROOT *cred*

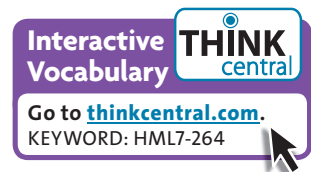
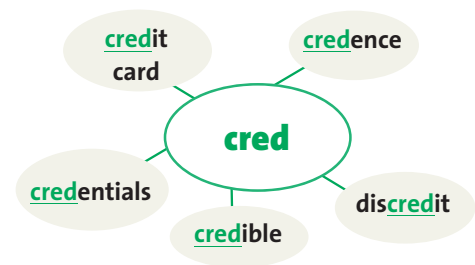
The Latin root *cred* means “believe.” This root is combined with various prefixes and suffixes to form a number of English words. For example, you already know that the vocabulary word *incredulously* means “in a way that shows doubt or disbelief.” To understand the meaning of other words with *cred*, use context clues and your knowledge of what this root means.

#### COMMON CORE

L4b Use Latin roots as clues to the meaning of a word.

**PRACTICE** Choose a word from the web that best completes each sentence.

1. If the witness is not \_\_\_\_\_, the jury will not believe her.
2. The opposition tried to \_\_\_\_\_ the candidate by making false statements about him.
3. Many banks offer customers a \_\_\_\_\_, which allows them to buy things without using cash.
4. When you come to the job interview, please bring all your \_\_\_\_\_ with you.
5. She gossips so much that it is hard to put any \_\_\_\_\_ in what she says.



## Writing for Assessment

### 1. READ THE PROMPT

In writing assessments, you will often be asked to compare and contrast two works that are similar in some way, such as two short stories with similar **characters**.

In four or five paragraphs, **compare and contrast** Great-Grandma from “The Three-Century Woman” and Laurie from “Charles.” Identify the characters’ similarities and differences, **citing details** from the two stories to support your ideas. Then **state** whether you think the characters are more alike than they are different.

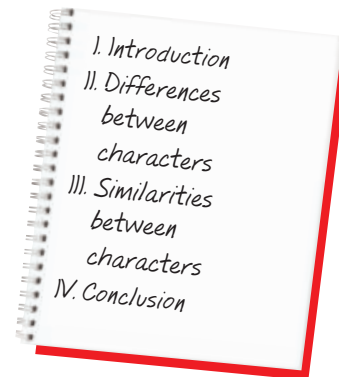
#### ◀ STRATEGIES IN ACTION

1. I have to **tell** the **similarities and differences** between the characters.
2. I need to **give examples** that show how the characters are **alike** and how they are **different**.
3. I need to **decide** whether the characters are more alike than they are different.

### 2. PLAN YOUR WRITING

Using your chart, identify the ways in which the characters are alike and the ways they are different. Then think about how to best present these similarities and differences.

- Write a position statement that presents your main idea.
- Review the stories to find quotations and details that support the similarities and the differences you have identified.
- Create an outline to organize your ideas. This sample outline shows one way to organize your paragraphs.



### 3. DRAFT YOUR RESPONSE

**Introduction** Introduce the characters you are comparing, the titles of the stories in which the characters appear, and your reason for comparing the characters. Also include your position statement.

**Body** Present the characters’ similarities and differences, using your outline as a guide. Make clear whether you think the similarities or differences are more important.

**Conclusion** State whether you think the characters are more alike than different. Leave your readers with a final thought about the two characters.

**Revision** Make sure each point of your comparison is supported by an example .