

# A Selection of Simple Prose Texts



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Edited by

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## PREFACE

This self-study textbook has been compiled and written for non-native students who are studying for a BA degree in English Literature—i.e. those using English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The book has been divided into various chapters. The first chapter is about an author's style. The ideas discussed in chapter one are crucial to the whole book, because they are reflected in the questions raised at the end of each chapter. Teaching foreign literature is not an easy task. EFL students are like travelers who have journeyed to a foreign land and have to be prepared before they can actually enjoy their trip. First, they should understand the language of the people in that land. Second, they should have a skilled guide who can point out the main features of interest in the land. Only under these conditions can the travelers be left on their own to make discoveries and enjoy the trip in their own way. After the first chapter, students are required to read the authentic texts, which have sometimes been modified for the purpose of clarity, and to use the glossary if needed. Students should be encouraged to try to guess the meanings of unknown words from their context. Difficult words have been highlighted in the texts, and alphabetically arranged and explained in the glossary lists.

This book is also designed to introduce students to a number of different kinds of writings taken from various periods in history. They have been taken from well-known authors and are meant to serve as an introduction to English-language prose. We have tried to pick out texts that are relevant to current social issues and problems in order to arouse the curiosity and interest of the students.

We hope that this textbook will provide an easy and attractive introduction to the wealth of literature in English. We would greatly appreciate receiving your comments and suggestions via [rbabaei30@yahoo.ca](mailto:rbabaei30@yahoo.ca) or [rbabae@letras.up.pt](mailto:rbabae@letras.up.pt).

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## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT IS AN AUTHOR'S STYLE?

SIAMAK BABAEE

An author's style is the way in which that author selects and arranges words, constructs sentences, and uses figures of speech so as to give their writing a certain flavor or personality.

Style is a writer's manner of expression. Style actually may refer to the style of a time period, a writer, or a particular work. Perhaps the best way to understand style is to think of differences in other creative forms: for instance, the difference between traditional, realistic art (Rembrandt or Van Gogh) and modern, abstract art (Picasso or Mondrian); or the difference between classical music (Beethoven) and jazz (Louis Armstrong) and country & western (Willie Nelson). All are forms of art or music, but they each use the techniques of their "trade" differently and they evoke different responses from, or have different effects on, their audiences.

Style in writing is very varied: the language, sentence structures, and level of formality are quite different today from what they were fifty or a hundred years ago, just as abstract art is nothing like nineteenth-century art; and individual writers may approach their particular literary medium (say, poetry) in very different ways, just as a classical musician and a jazz musician do.

In this book, we will be looking at style principally in terms of the writer and sometimes of a particular work more often than in terms of a time period. Writers generally exhibit a characteristic style throughout most of their works. Typically, three aspects make up an author's style: **sentence structure, diction, and tone.**

**Sentence structure** refers to the general pattern of sentence forms used by a writer. Some authors use a spare style composed mostly of short, simple sentences or compound sentences combined with conjunctions like “and” or “but”. Descriptions and imagery are straightforward, fairly literal, and consist usually of **denotative** descriptors with few metaphors or similes, leaving the reader to form his or her own impressions of the scene. The best well-known example of this style is Ernest Hemingway. “Hills Like White Elephants,” for example, begins with these sentences:

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went to Madrid.

Notice how unadorned this writing is, and that most of the sentences are brief or simple in structure.

Other writers use longer, more complicated sentence structures, like complex sentences connected with semicolons or subordinating conjunctions (“although,” “because,” “since,” etc.), or sentences containing dependent and appositive clauses. Such descriptions are rich in **connotation**; their imagery is imaginative, full of figures of speech, and intended to deliberately shape impressions in the reader. A well-known writer using this style is William Faulkner, whose individual sentences sometimes stretch into paragraphs! Dorothy Parker provides a good illustration of this style in her opening paragraph for “The Standard of Living”:

Annabel and Maggie came out of the tea room with the arrogant slow gait of the leisured, for their Saturday afternoon stretched ahead of them. They had lunched as was their wont, on sugar, starches, oils, and butter-fats. Usually they ate sandwiches of spongy new white bread greased with butter and mayonnaise, they ate thick wedges of cake lying wet beneath ice cream and whipped cream and melted chocolate gritty with nuts. As alternates, they ate patties, sweating beads of inferior oil, containing bits of bland meat bogged in pale, stiffening sauce; they ate pastries, limber under rigid icing, filled with an indeterminate yellow sweet stuff, not still solid, not yet liquid, like

salve that has been left in the sun. They chose no other sort of food, nor did they consider it. And their skin was like the petals of wood anemones, and their bellies were as flat and their flanks as lean as those of young Indian braves.

A second aspect of style is **diction**. Diction refers to the writer's choice of words. Some choose to write much as if they were speaking to us, using slang and other loose speech forms, in what is termed a **colloquial** style ("Who's that dude a-draggin' by?"). Others choose an **informal** style that uses contractions and ordinary language but is not as loose as real speech ("Who's that man walking by so slow?"). Still others choose a **formal**, rather elevated style with language not usually heard in speech—what some call highbrow ("Who is that male personage perambulating so slowly past?").

The third aspect of style is **tone**, which is the author's attitude toward the work, events, characters, or the reader/audience. For instance, he or she may be neutral, or amused, or saddened, or satirical in his/her attitude. Tone also refers to the emotional "feel" that a work has for the reader/audience. Tone comes mainly from the language or vocabulary chosen and the combinations of words used, and from the narrative **point of view**—the writer's stance toward the work. The author may be detached from the work, giving it a serious or matter-of-fact tone. Alternatively, the author may be more involved, resulting in a humorous, ironic, satirical, playful, sad, resigned, supercilious, or other tone.

In the following chapters, by reference to what you have learned about style, try to answer the questions raised in the exercise 3 of each chapter.



### Exercise 3

*Write the answer to the following questions about the author's style:*

1. Does the author use long or short sentences, simple or complex structures, formal or informal language? Give examples.
2. Are imagery, metaphorical language, and connotation characteristics in the writing of this passage, or is it just plain and literal in its approach?
3. How is the tone of the passage?

### Glossary

**Deliberately** = intentionally

**Literal** = concerned with the usual meaning of a word

**Perambulating** = walking about

**Resigned** = showing patient acceptance of something unpleasant

**Stance** = position

**Straightforward** = easy to understand

**Supercilious** = scornful



## CHAPTER TWO

### AMIR KABIR (REFORMER AND EDUCATOR)

#### JAMAL M. KASHANI

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran found itself being squeezed inexorably between the pincers of two colonial powers—England and Russia—which sought to make Iran a tool for their own devious purposes. England was anxious to protect its firm but vulnerable grip on India by using Iranian territory as a buffer zone against potential aggression. Russia schemed to gain access to the Indian Ocean. In this critical period the country was sorely in need of a strong leader who could rekindle the spirit of nationalism that had lain dormant so long. But the monarch Mohammad Shah (1834-48) was stricken with gout, and his vain and callous grand vazir, Haji Mirza Aghassi, had little interest in anything except the national treasury, which he depleted to a precariously low level and in the process brought the country to the brink of revolution. So great was his selfishness that even the prospect of civil war did not deter him from opposing the accession of the heir-apparent, Nasser-eddin. Had such a conflict broken out, it is possible that Iran as a national entity might have ceased to exist, in view of the fact that England and Russia had secretly conspired to split the spoils of Iran's disintegrating society.

Only the hand of providence seems to have kept such a catastrophe from occurring. Upon receiving the news of the death of Mohammad Shah, Mirza Taghi Khan, commander of the Azerbaijan garrison, promptly proclaimed the King's son, Nasser-eddin, as the new monarch and accompanied him to Tehran, where he was crowned six weeks later. On the way, the 17-year-old Shah bestowed on Mirza Taghi Khan the title of Amir-e-Nezam, or commander of the armed forces. Shortly before his coronation he also named him chief minister with the title Sadr-e-Azam. Accepting the job but refusing the title, Mirza Taghi Khan became popularly known as Amir Kabir, the great minister. He replaced Haji Mirza Aghassi, who continued his intrigues until his dying day, all the while shrouding his treasonous schemes behind a veil of patriotism. Amir

Kabir dedicated his public service to bringing Iran abreast of Western science and technology. It was a task he was forced to pursue alone. Thwarted on one side by the country's powerful conservatives and reactionaries, and openly sabotaged on the other side by the corrupt Ghajar court, Amir Kabir struggled on until his ultimate murder put an end to a career that might have rivaled that of the brilliant 11<sup>th</sup> century administrator, Nezam-ol-Molk.

His father was Karbalai Ghorban, a cook on the staff of Ghajar minister Ghaem Magham. The minister, noticing the intellectual talent of young Mirza Taghi Khan, made provision for him to attend the same classes as his sons and then, when the boy completed his education, hired him as a translator in Iran's budding diplomatic service. At the age of 22 he joined the army and rose rapidly through the ranks until he became a commander of the Azerbaijan garrison. In his official capacity he made visits to Moscow and St. Petersburg, visits that broadened his political and economic outlook and which strongly influenced the reforms he later attempted. Mirza Taghi Khan also spent five years as Iran's envoy to Ottoman Turkey, and his performance during this time, especially as the Iranian delegate to the Erzurum Boundary Commission, was such that even Mirza Aghassi felt obliged to acknowledge his achievements.

By then British and Russian exploitation of Iran was at its height, and many members of the aristocracy had morally sold themselves to the Western powers while the central government made weak protests in order to mask its importance. Working single-handedly amid such chaos, Amir Kabir could not have brought about the reforms he did if it had not been for the support of the young Shah, who gave his only sister, Ezat-od-Dowleh, to him in marriage. Together with the monarch, whom he briefed daily, Amir Kabir produced something Iran had not seen in decades: a corruption-free administration devoted to a realistic reform program that had a good chance of putting the nation on its feet again. Things proceeded well for four years, and then, with alarming suddenness, the situation reversed itself. Amir Kabir's enemies planted suspicions in the Shah's mind, making him apprehensive of his minister's popularity and the speed with which he has instituting his reforms. Amir Kabir, realizing what was happening, tried to warn the monarch; but Nasser-eddin Shah was too engrossed in the pleasure of the harem to take heed.

In one of the several letters to the King, Amir Kabir was blunt to the point of impertinence: “by such procrastination one cannot rule the country. I may be ill or dead and sacrificed to the dust of thy auspicious feet. But why dost thou not keep abreast of events in the city to ascertain what is happening? The artillery and ammunition that should have been sent to Astarabad: have they been dispatched? What is taking place in the provinces and among the people there? I am bed-ridden and my ailment may not be cured, but you, Sire, must not discontinue your own work and depend constantly on a person who himself is dependent on another.” Nasser-eddin was not pleased. The gulf between him and his chief minister widened until finally he refused to grant an audience for the customary daily briefing. Next morning Amir Kabir received a letter written in the King’s own hand informing him that he was being relieved of his duties for reasons of health, but that he would remain as commander of the Army. A beautiful jeweled sword accompanied the letter.

Deciding to abandon the political arena, Amir Kabir retired to his home. Meanwhile, the monarch, who was reportedly unhappy at having had to make a decision which he regarded as forced upon him by Amir Kabir’s British-backed enemies, appointed Agha Khan Noori, a pro-British chieftain, as his new Chief Minister. The Russian envoy then promptly declared that Amir Kabir was under the protection of the Czar. His worst suspicions now aroused, Nasser-eddin Shah exiled his former minister to Kashan, where he hoped he would be out of the public eye. But Amir Kabir’s popularity remained undimmed, so that the monarch in his desperation sent an assassination squad to solve the problem once and for all. This vicious murder took place in Kashan’s Hammam of Fin in 1852. Amir Kabir’s wrists were slashed and, as he lay bleeding to death, he was brutally kicked and strangled. The greatest Iranian reformer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century fell victim to the prejudice and foreign intrigue that he had devoted his career to combating.

Amir Kabir’s death proved to be a major setback for Iran. His political reforms quickly crumbled and his efforts to instill new levels of scholarship in Iranian education were soon forgotten. Among his more notable achievements were the establishment of a regular army supported by its own armaments factory, a reliable postal system, the country’s first national budget, and the founding of Iran’s first scientific institute, Dar-ol-Fonoon, which provided many of the educated leaders of the constitutional movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He ordered the translation of Western technical publications into Persian, established national newspapers, built hospitals, conducted a nation-wide small-pox vaccination campaign and

took measures to preserve important archaeological sites. A degree of political security was obtained by abolishing some oppressive practices of the upper class. In an effort to build new industries, Iranians were sent to Russia for training, mines were opened, and foreign trade fostered. But in the eyes of the autocratic ruling class these reforms were threats to the feudalistic system and the security it afforded them.

Amir Kabir's death was a blow from which Iran did not recover until the overthrow of the Ghajars by Reza Shah in 1921. British author G.R. Watson, in his history of Persia, says, "It is a hopeless task to find a capable man in Persia to replace Amir Kabir at this period. This man was comparable to Nezam-ol-Molk, Bismark of Prussia, and Gladstone of Britain." Colonel Sabil, the British minister who was partially responsible for Amir Kabir's downfall, admitted that "he was a man of integrity who could not be bought for money." Count Joseph Gobineau, the noted French diplomat, agreed that "Amir Kabir was the only one who accepted no bribes and it was he who eliminated it in his country during his administration." Professor Seyed Hossein Naser notes that Amir Kabir "remains for the contemporary Persian a man of great vision who sought to serve his country during a difficult period, when potent foreign influence in Iran made autonomous action difficult." Even Lord Curzon, writing of the Erzurum Boundary Commission, described Amir Kabir, the Iranian representative as "beyond all comparison the most interesting personage amongst the commission of Turkey, Persia, Russia and Great Britain who were then assembled at Erzurum."

In his voluminous correspondence Amir Kabir made a highly documented record of Russian and British interference in Iranian affairs. His letters revealed that few countries outside of Latin America were so unscrupulously and systematically violated as was Iran. With the most capable administrator removed from the political stage, Nasser-eddin Shah's reign became a dismal parody of monarchical rule. During the Irano-British war English forces occupied Kharg Island, Bushehr, Khorramshahr and Ahwaz. In the peace treaty of 1857, the Shah agreed to evacuate Afghanistan and recognize its independence. Nevertheless, the king's ego remained undeflatable throughout the whole period that his empire was falling apart around him.

## Exercise 1

*The following questions may be used for classroom discussion, for composition, or for both.*

1. What were England's and Russia's primary aims in Iran during the second half of the nineteenth century?
2. Why was it dangerous for Iran for Haji Mirza Aghassi to oppose the succession of the heir-apparent?
3. What prevented a civil war from breaking out?
4. How old was the new king, and what positions did he give to Amir Kabir?
5. After being deposed, how did Haji Mirza Aghassi spend his time?
6. What were the major forces opposing Amir Kabir's reform program?
7. What were his early positions, and how successful was he in them?
8. In their relations with the Western powers, what was the behavior of the aristocracy and of the central government?
9. Whom did Amir Kabir marry, and what did this show?
10. What was Amir Kabir's working relationship with the young shah, and how much did the two together achieve for their country?
11. What did Amir Kabir say in his letter to the king that made it impertinent?
12. How bad did personal relations become between the two men? How did the shah reduce Amir Kabir's responsibilities?
13. How did the shah interpret the fact that the czar supported Amir Kabir?
14. How, where, and when was Amir Kabir assassinated?
15. Why may we say that Amir Kabir was "ahead of his time" in his aims and programs for Iran?
16. On Amir Kabir's death, what happened to his governmental and educational reforms?
17. How did he deal with the upper class?
18. Why did this help to bring about his downfall?
19. In what way do Amir Kabir's many letters show that Iran was, in many ways, like Latin America?
20. How did the foreign powers take advantage of the weakness of the Iranian government after Amir Kabir's death?
21. What effect did Iran's loss of power have on the Shah's opinion of himself?





15. The shah became apprehensive of his minister's popularity.  
This means that he showed:

- a) *fear*                      b) *suspicion*                      c) *jealousy*                      d) *anxiety*

16. In a letter to the king, Amir Kabir was blunt to the point of  
impertinence.

This means that he was:

- a) *plain-spoken*                      b) *indelicate*  
c) *rough*                      d) *uncivilized*

17. The gulf between Amir Kabir and the King widened.

“Gulf” here means:

- a) *valley*                      b) *body of water*  
c) *division*                      d) *separation*

18. Amir Kabir's death proved to be a major setback for Iran.

This means that it was:

- a) *an injury*                      b) *disastrous*  
c) *a retirement*                      d) *a reversal*

19. Amir Kabir established a regular army with its own armaments factory.  
What kind of factory was this?

- a) *munitions*                      b) *military*  
c) *bullets*                      d) *explosives*

20. Nasser-eddin Shah's reign became a dismal parody of monarchical  
rule.

This means that it was a:

- a) *weak imitation*                      b) *comedy*  
c) *similarity*                      d) *shadow*

21. Foreign trade was fostered.

This means that trade was:

- a) *unlimited*                      b) *taken care of*  
c) *tended carefully*                      d) *promoted*

22. Colonel Sabil admitted that Amir Kabir “was a man of integrity who  
could not be bought for money.”

This means that Amir Kabir showed:

- a) *uprightness*                      b) *honesty*  
c) *incorruptibility*                      d) *completeness*

23. Professor Nasr has written that during Amir Kabir's life, "potent foreign influence in Iran made autonomous action difficult."

The desired action was:

- a) *automatic*                      b) *independent*  
c) *reforming*                      d) *powerful*

24. Few countries outside Latin America were so unscrupulously and systematically violated as was Iran.

The manner of Iran's violation was:

- a) *organized*      b) *thorough*      c) *methodical*      d) *immoral*

### Exercise 3

*Write the answer to the following questions about the author's style:*

1. Does the author use long or short sentences, simple or complex structures, formal or informal language? Give examples.
2. Is imagery, metaphorical language, and connotation a characteristic in the writing of this passage, or is it just plain and literal in its approach?
3. How is the tone of the passage?

### Glossary

**Abreast** = aware of; on the same level as

**Accession** = reaching a position (such as a throne)

**Apprehensive** = uneasy; worried

**Arena** = scene of competition or struggle

**Armaments** = munitions

**Autocratic** = with unlimited power

**Autonomous** = independent

**Bed-ridden** = confined to one's bed

**Blunt** = plain; outspoken

**Brief** = instruct; keep informed

**Brink** = edge

**Budding** = beginning to develop

**Budget** = estimate of income and expenditure

**Buffer zone** = protective or neutral area

**Callous** = unfeeling; insensitive

**Capacity** = position

**Catastrophe** = disaster

**Coronation** = ceremony of crowning a ruler

**Curb** = to limit; restrain

**Dedicate** = devote

**Deplete** = drain; use up; empty

**Devious** = not straightforward

**Dismal** = miserable

**Dormant** = inactive; sleeping

**Ego** = individual's perception of oneself

- Entity** = something with an independent existence
- Evacuate** = get out of; leave
- Exploit** = use selfishly for one's own reasons
- Foster** = promote; encourage
- Garrison** = military force stationed in a town
- Gout** = a painful disease
- Grant an audience** = give a formal interview
- Gulf** = division
- Heir-apparent** = next in line to the throne
- Impertinence** = absence of proper respect
- Inexorably** = relentlessly; unyieldingly
- Integrity** = uprightness; incorruptibility
- Parody** = imitation
- Personage** = important person
- Precariously** = dangerously
- Procrastination** = delaying action; putting things off
- Providence** = God
- Ranks** = different military grades
- Reactionary** = opponent of progress or reform
- Rekindle** = relight; revitalize
- Sabotage** = hinder an opponent's activity
- Setback** = reverse; check to progress
- Shroud** = hide; conceal
- Sorely** = greatly; severely
- Spoils** = plunder; loot
- Squad** = small group of people working together
- Studded** = ornamented with something inset
- Take heed of** = listen or pay attention to
- Thwarted** = frustrated; held back
- Undeatable** = incapable of being made smaller/controlled
- Voluminous** = great in quantity or amount
- Vulnerable** = not protected against attack

## CHAPTER THREE

### SHAME

DICK GREGORY

I never learned hate at home, or shame. I had to go to school for that. I was about seven years old when I got my first big lesson. I was in love with a little girl named Helene Tucker, a light-complected little girl with pigtails and nice manners. She was always clean and she was smart in school. I think I went to school then mostly to look at her. I brushed my hair and even got me a little old handkerchief. It was a lady's handkerchief, but I didn't want Helene to see me wipe my nose on my hand. The pipes were frozen again, there was no water in the house, but I washed my socks and shirt every night. I'd get a pot, and go over to Mister Ben's grocery store, and stick my pot down into his soda machine. Scoop out some chopped ice. By evening the ice melted to water for washing. I got sick a lot that winter because the fire would go out at night before the clothes were dry. In the morning I'd put them on, wet or dry, because they were the only clothes I had.

Everybody's got a Helene Tucker, a symbol of everything you want. I loved her for her goodness, her cleanness, her popularity. She'd walk down my street and my brothers and sisters would yell. "Here comes Helene," and I'd rub my tennis sneakers on the back of my pants and wish my hair wasn't so nappy and the white folks' shirt fit me better. I'd run out on the street. If I knew my place and didn't come too close, she'd wink at me and say hello. That was a good feeling. Sometimes I'd follow her all the way home, and shovel the snow off her walk and try to make friends with her Momma and her aunts. I'd drop money on her stoop late at night on my way back from shining shoes in the taverns. And she had a Daddy, and he had a good job. He was a paper hanger.

I guess I would have gotten over Helene by summertime, but something happened in that classroom that made her face hang in front of me for the next twenty-two years. When I played the drums in high school

it was for Helene and when I broke track records in college it was for Helene and when I started standing behind microphones and heard applause I wished Helene could hear it, too. It wasn't until I was twenty-nine years old and married and making money that I finally got her out of my system. Helene was sitting in that classroom when I learned to be ashamed of myself.

It was on a Thursday. I was sitting in the back of the room, in a seat with a chalk circle drawn around it. The idiot's seat, the troublemaker's seat.

The teacher thought I was stupid. Couldn't spell, couldn't read, and couldn't do arithmetic. Just stupid. Teachers were never interested in finding out that you couldn't concentrate because you were so hungry, because you hadn't had any breakfast. All you could think about was noontime, would it ever come? Maybe you could sneak into the cloakroom and steal a bite of some kid's lunch out of a coat pocket. A bite of something. Paste. You can't really make a meal of paste, or put it on bread for a sandwich, but sometimes I'd scoop a few spoonfuls out of the paste jar in the back of the room. Pregnant people get strange tastes. I was pregnant with poverty. Pregnant with dirt and pregnant with smells that made people turn away, pregnant with cold and pregnant with shoes that were never bought for me. Pregnant with five other people in my bed and no daddy in the next room, and pregnant with hunger. Paste doesn't taste too bad when you're hungry.

The teacher thought I was a troublemaker. All she saw from the front of the room was a little black boy who squirmed in his idiot's seat and made noises and poked the kids around him. I guess she couldn't see a kid who made noises because he wanted someone to know he was there.

It was on a Thursday, the day before the Negro payday. The eagle always flew on Friday. The teacher was asking each student how much his father would give to the Community Chest. On Friday night, each kid would get the money from his father, and on Monday he would bring it to the school. I decided I was going to buy me a daddy right then. I had money in my pocket from shining shoes and selling papers, and whatever Helene Tucker pledged for her daddy I was going to top it. And I'd hand the money right in. I wasn't going to wait until Monday to buy me a Daddy.

I was shaking, scared to death. The teacher opened her book and started calling out names alphabetically.

“Helene Tucker?”

“My daddy said he’d give two dollars and fifty cents.”

“That’s very nice, Helene. Very, very nice indeed.”

That made me feel pretty good. It wouldn’t take too much to top that. I had almost three dollars in dimes and quarters in my pocket. I stuck my hand in my pocket and held onto the money, waiting for her to call my name. But the teacher closed her book after she called everybody else in the class.

I stood up and raise my hand.

“What is it now?”

“You forgot me.”

She turned toward the blackboard. “I don’t have time to be playing with you, Richard.”

“My Daddy said he’d ...”

“Sit down, Richard, you’re disturbing class.”

“My Daddy said he’d give ... fifteen dollars.”

She turned around and looked mad. “We are collecting this money for you and your kind, Richard Gregory. If your Daddy can give fifteen dollars you have no business being on relief.”

“I got it right now, I got it right now, my Daddy gave it to me to turn it today, my Daddy said ...”

“And furthermore,” she said, looking right at me, her nostrils getting big and her lips getting thin and her eyes opening wide, “we know you don’t have a Daddy.”

Helene Tucker turned around, her eyes full of tears. She felt sorry for me. Then I couldn’t see her too well because I was crying, too.

“Sit down, Richard.”

And I always thought the teacher kind of liked me. She always picked me to wash the blackboard on Friday, after school. That was a big thrill, it made me feel important. If I didn't wash it, come Monday the school might not function right.

“Where are you going, Richard?”

I walked out of school that day, and for a long time I didn't go back very often. There was shame there.

Now there was shame everywhere. It seemed like the whole world had been inside that classroom, everyone had heard what the teacher had said, and everyone had turned around and felt sorry for me. There was shame in going to the Worthy Boys Annual Christmas Dinner for you and your kind, because everybody knew what a worthy boy was. Why couldn't they just call it the Boys Annual Dinner, why'd they have to give it a name? There was shame in wearing the brown and orange and white plaid mackinaw the welfare gave to 31000 boys. Why'd it have to be the same for everybody so when you walked down the street the people could see you were on relief? It was a nice warm mackinaw and it had a hood, and my Momma beat me and called me a little rat when she found out I stuffed it in the bottom of a pail full of garbage way over on Cottage Street. There was shame in running over to Mister Ben's at the end of the day and asking for his rotten peaches, there was shame in asking Mrs. Simmons for a spoonful of sugar, there was shame in running out to meet the relief truck. I hated that truck, full of food for you and your kind. I ran into the house and hid when it came. And then I started to sneak through alleys, to take the long way home so the people going into White's Eat Shop wouldn't see me. Yeah, the whole world heard the teacher that day, we all know you don't have a Daddy.

It lasted for a while, this kind of numbness. I spent a lot of time feeling sorry for myself. And then one day I met this wino in a restaurant. I'd been out hustling all day, shining shoes, selling newspapers, and I had goo-gobs of money in my pocket. Bought me a bowl of chili for fifteen cents, and a cheeseburger for fifteen cents, and a Pepsi for five cents, and a piece of chocolate cake for ten cents. That was a good meal. I was eating when this old wino came in. I love winos because they never hurt anyone but themselves.

The old wino sat down at the counter and ordered twenty-six cents worth of food. He ate it like he really enjoyed it. When the owner, Mister Williams, asked him to pay the check, the old wino didn't lie or go through his pocket like he suddenly found a hole.

He just said: "don't have no money."

The owner yelled: "why in hell you come in here and eat my food if you don't have no money? That food cost me money."

Mister Williams jumped over the counter and knocked the wino off his stool and beat him over the head with a pop bottle. Then he stepped back and watched the wino bleed. Then he kicked him. And he kicked him again.

I looked at the wino with blood all over his face and I went over. "Leave him alone, Minster Williams. I'll pay the twenty-six cents."

The wino got up, slowly, pulling himself up to the stool, then up to the counter, holding on for a minute until his legs stopped shaking so bad. He looked at me with pure hate. "Keep your twenty-six cents. You don't have to pay, not now. I just finished paying for it."

He started to walk out, and as he passed me, he reached down and touched my shoulder. "Thanks, sonny, but it's too late now. Why didn't you pay it before?"

I was pretty sick about that. I waited too long to help another man.

### Exercise 1

*The following questions may be used for classroom discussion, for composition, or for both.*

1. What does the narrator mean by “I was about seven years old when I got my first big lesson”?
2. How/why did the narrator provide water?
3. What does “everybody’s got a Helene Tucker” mean?
4. What does “the white folks’ shirt fit me better” mean?
5. How old is the narrator while writing this story?
6. What does “got her out of my system” mean?
7. What is “the idiot’s seat”?
8. What is it that the teachers cannot understand about their students?
9. Why was noontime important for the narrator?
10. What was the teacher’s opinion about the narrator?
11. What is meant by the writer in saying “the eagle always flew on Friday”?
12. What does “I decided I was going to buy me a daddy right then” mean?
13. What happened during calling the names for charity?
14. What was the narrator’s reaction to being ignored by the teacher?
15. What was the narrator’s reaction before and after the classroom event?
16. What was Helene’s reaction toward the teacher’s behavior?
17. Why did wino look at the narrator with pure hate?

### Exercise 2

*Choose the best answer (a, b, c, or d):*

1. I’d get a pot, and go over to Mister Ben’s grocery store, and stick my pot down into his soda machine.

What would the narrator do with the pot?

- a) remember      b) push      c) thrust      d) both b and c

2. Scoop out some chopped ice.

What would the narrator do with the ice?

- a) dig      b) remove      c) pick up      d) all of the above