



Read-Aloud

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Teaching Charts & Tools

Experienced readers expect to pay attention to details that suggest:

- Who is in the story (what is specific and unusual about the characters)
- Perspective (the particular voice(s))
- What kind of place this is
- Issues and conflicts (explicit and implicit)
- What the story is beginning to be about (possible themes)
- Lessons characters learn and teach
- Possible symbolism
- Overarching themes

Predictable Feedback/Tips

1. Rereading pays off – and attending to detail.
Assume details matter, assume you've missed some.
2. “What in the text makes you say that.”
3. Figuring out when is your perspective as a reader different than the perspective of the characters.
4. Not only supporting your ideas with details, but not always quoting them in the same order they come up in the text (not only sort, rank)

Planning Strategic Read-Aloud

1. Consider what I want readers to attend to/what kind of thinking work we're working on
2. Figure out my first prompt/lens, and how much I want to read before I suggest re-reading.
3. Look for how much of the text I want to read before we pause to talk.
4. Mark my text with where I'll alert kids to the prompt/lens, and where I'll pause for partner talk.
5. Double check that I haven't taken up too much text that I need for the next prompt/lens.
6. Tuck in possible feedback/tips along the way
7. Rehearse what readers might see/say

Phrases that help with transfer

"We're going to do some reading work, and the book we're going to practice this in is..."

"I'm going to give you some feedback, as we read, on how you are becoming a more sophisticated reader..."

"In the kinds of books you're reading now..."

"This isn't just true in this story, it's true in a lot of stories..."

"This doesn't just work in this book, it's going to work in yours as well..."

"So, think right now, how would this play out in your story/book?"

"Where is there a page in your book, where this work would pay off?"

"If you were to try some of this thinking in your book, what part of this work would be most interesting?"

Predictable Feedback/Tips

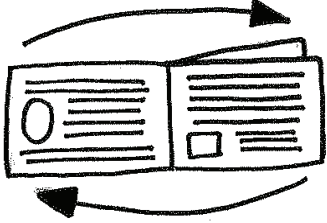
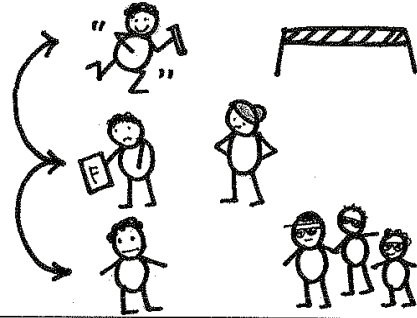
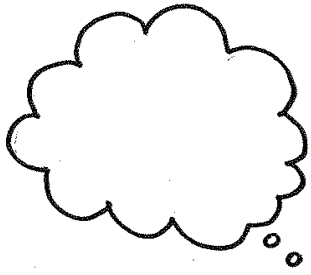
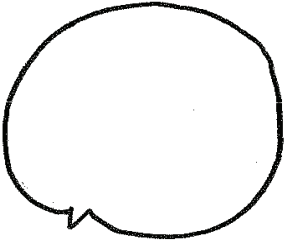
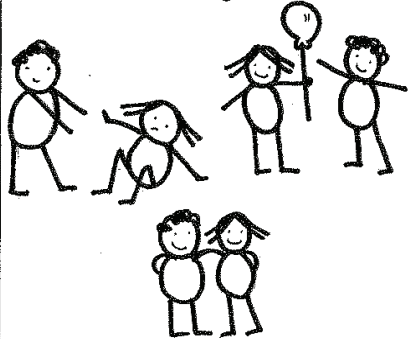
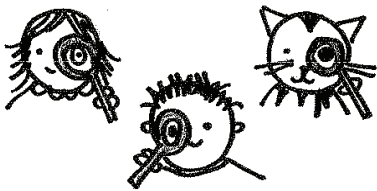

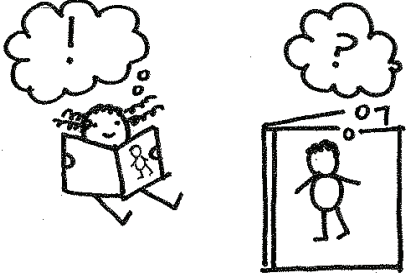
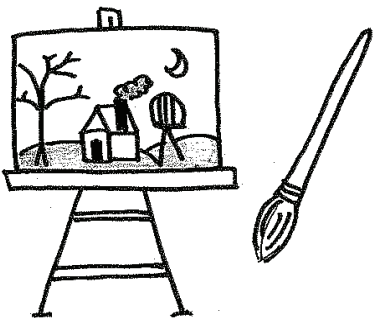

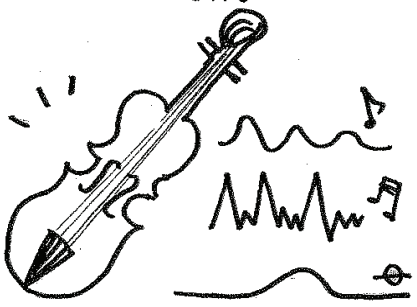
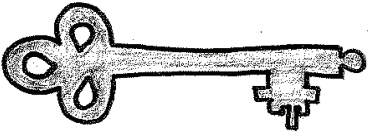
1. Rereading pays off - attending to detail.
Assume details matter.
2. "What in the text makes you say that."
3. Figuring out when is your perspective as a reader different than the perspective of the characters.
4. Not only supporting your ideas with details, but ranking these details in terms of importance.
5. Tracing more than one idea in the story
6. Asking yourself: What thinking work does this book want me to do right now?

Planning Strategic Read-Aloud

1. Consider what you want readers to attend to/what kind of thinking work we're working on
2. Figure out your first prompt/lens, and how early you'll give it.
3. Look for how much of the text you want to read before you pause to talk.
4. Mark your text with where you'll alert kids to the prompt/lens, and where you'll pause for partner talk.
5. Double check that you haven't taken up too much text that you need for the next prompt/lens.
6. Tuck in possible feedback/tips along the way
7. Rehearse what readers might see/say

Narrative Writers

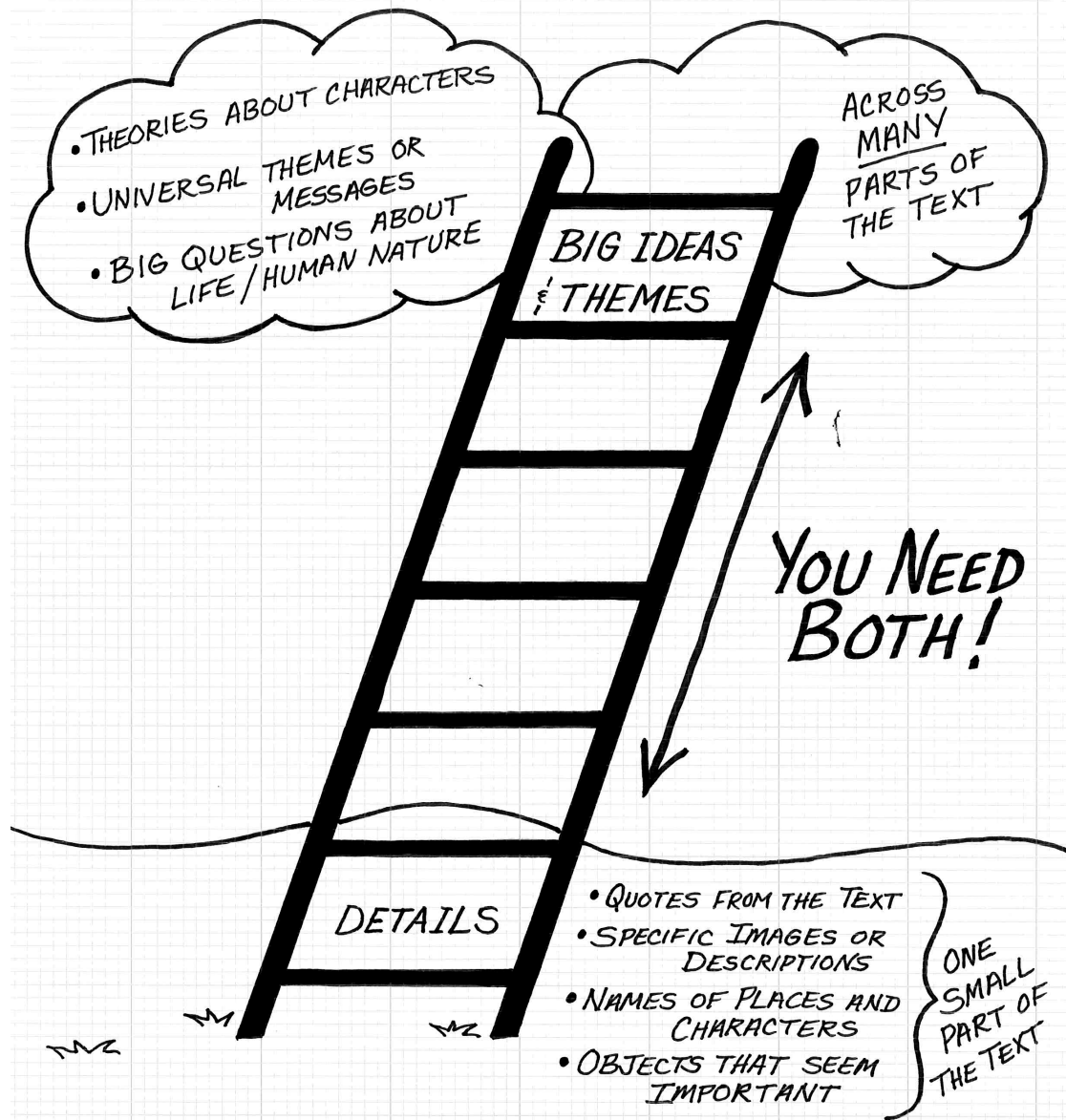
Use Techniques Such As...

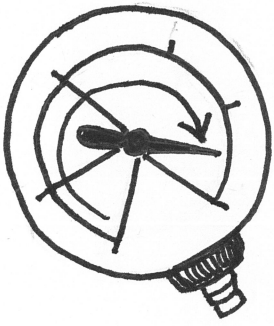
<p>Flashback & flashforward</p> 	<p>Multiple plot lines</p> 	<p>Inner thinking</p> 
<p>Dialogue</p> 	<p>Revealing actions</p> 	<p>Multiple points of view</p> 
<p>1st person narrator</p> 	<p>Reader knows MORE than the character</p> 	<p>Description</p> 
<p>Metaphor</p> 	<p>Tone</p> 	<p>Symbolism</p> 

Narrative Writers Aim Towards Goals Such As...

<p>Provide the context/background information</p> 	<p>Introduce the characters</p> 	<p>Show the character's motivation</p> 
<p>Stir empathy</p> 	<p>Create the setting</p> 	<p>Build a mood</p> 
<p>Set up the problem</p> 	<p>Raise the stakes</p> 	<p>Build suspense</p> 
<p>Get readers predicting</p> 	<p>Support the theme</p> 	<p>Show the resolution</p> 

LADDER OF ABSTRACTION





Questions to Pressure Partners to Deepen Their Thinking



- ? *What is the most significant new idea or thinking you've been developing as you read?*
- ? *Why does that idea feel important to the whole book?*
- ? *Where is the first place in the text that sparked that thinking?*
- ? *What passage or line is most important to this idea? Why is it significant?*
- ? *How has your thinking about this idea changed across the book? Why?*
- ? *Can you imagine someone arguing with that idea of yours? What might that person say? How might you respond?*

Growing Powerful Book Club Conversations

~ *Listen to conversation like it's gold:*

➤ *lean in*

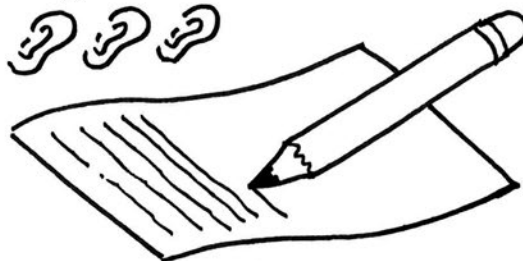
➤ *make eye contact*



➤ *let the person speaking finish his or her thought*



➤ *jot notes*



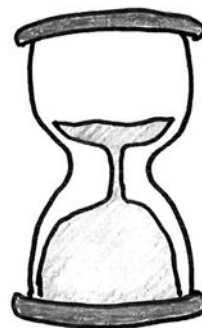
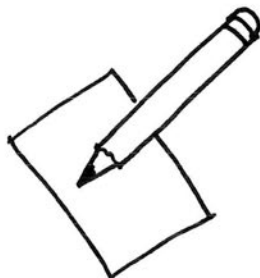
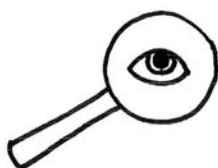
~ *Be aware of any member who has gone unheard. Invite him or her in.*

What do you think?

~ *Together look closely at one artifact:*

➤ *jot responses*

➤ *talk for as long as possible*



Practice Texts

The Cool-Air Chair by Jack Gantos

We don't have air-conditioning in our house and it is hot in Florida. I hate feeling sweaty. So one day when my mom left to go shopping I got a genius idea and sneakily pulled a chair up to the open refrigerator door. I took a paperback out of my pocket and sat on the chair and propped my sneakers up on an inside shelf. I felt brilliant. The cool air blew over my legs and across my chest and face as I read in total air-conditioned bliss.

Once I invented this luxurious way to read I would pull up a chair in front of the refrigerator each time she left the house to go shopping.

But one day I was reading a good book and lost track of time. Suddenly I heard Mom's car pull up the driveway. Yikes! I jumped into action and rapidly put the chair back where it belonged. I closed the refrigerator door, and tossed my book down the hall. By the time Mom entered the house with a bag of groceries I was standing on the other side of the kitchen with an innocent look glued onto my face. I thought I was so super sneaky.

And then my mother opened the refrigerator door. She didn't say anything, but something seemed wrong to her. When she is quiet I know she is thinking. The longer she stood there the harder my heart began to pound.

Finally, she turned and called out, "Jack! Come look into the refrigerator and explain this to me!"

I dashed over to the refrigerator. "What, Mom?" I asked in my innocent voice. "What may I help you with?"

She pointed to the top shelf and asked, "Why are your steaming sneakers in the refrigerator?"

I had stupidly kicked them off when I was reading and forgot to take them out.

I shrugged. "Weird stuff happens," is all I could think to say as I looked down at my bare feet. My mother followed my gaze. She reached down and gripped my foot. It was as cold as the refrigerator.

"Confess," she ordered, and narrowed her eyes at me.

I told her what I had been doing. I thought she would kill me, but she just shook her head back and forth and smiled.

"Never let your father catch you doing this," she warned me. "He's been complaining that the electric bill has suddenly climbed sky-high."

"I have been reading a lot," I said proudly, then I gave her a hug.

"Next time," she whispered, "pull up an extra chair for me."

I knew why she was letting me off the hook. She was a reader, too.

popularity

Somewhere inside me I knew that ten-year-old boys were not supposed to spend their recess circling oak trees in search of four-leaf clovers. Still, that's what I and my equally unpopular acquaintances, Allan Gold and Allan Shipman, were doing while the rest of our classmates played tag and kickball and pushed each other higher and higher on the swings.

Aside from having a little more than our share of baby fat, the two Allans and I had very little in common. In fact, we could barely stand one another. Still, during recess we were the only company we had, so we tried to make the best of it. Now and then one of us would bend forward, pick a clover, examine it, shake his head, and let it fall to the ground.

"Got one," Allan Gold said.

"Let's see," Allan Shipman said.

Allan showed Allan the clover.

"That's only three."

"No, that's four. Right here. See?"

"That's not a whole leaf," Allan Shipman said sourly.
"There's one leaf, two leaves, three leaves."
"Four leaves!"

"That's not a whole leaf!"

We had been looking for four-leaf clovers every school day for six months. And each of us knew exactly what he would do if he ever found one: he would hold the lucky clover tight in his hand, close his eyes, and wish he was so popular that he would never have to spend time with the other two again.

"Got one!" Allan Shipman said.

Allan Gold swiped the clover from him. "One, two, three," he said, throwing it to the ground.

"There's four there! That was a four-leaf clover! Pick it up!"

"You pick it up!"

"You pick it up!"

"You!"

"You!"

While the two Allans faced off, I looked across the black tar and asphalt at a crowd of boys who were making more noise and seemed to be having more fun than anyone else on the playground. These were the popular boys, and in the center of this group stood their leader, Sean Owens.

Sean Owens was the best student in the fourth grade. He was also one of the humblest, handsomest, strongest, fastest, most clear-thinking ten-year-olds that God ever placed on the face of the earth. Sean Owens could run the fifty-yard dash in six seconds, hit

a baseball two hundred feet, and throw a football forty yards. The only thing Sean didn't have was a personality. He didn't need one. When you can hit a baseball two hundred feet, all you have to do is round the bases and wait for the world's adulation.

I gazed at Sean and the rest of the popular boys in bewildered admiration. It seemed like only yesterday that we had all played kickball, dodgeball, and basketball together; and then one morning I awoke to find that this happy democracy had devolved into a monarchy of kings and queens, dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies. It did not take a genius to know that, upon the continent of this playground, the two Allans and I were stableboys.

I had been resigned to my rank for many months, but now, looking at the two Allans (still arguing over the same three-leaf clover), then at the popular boys, I suddenly knew that I could not stand another day at the bottom—I wanted to be a part of the noise and the laughter; I wanted, I *needed*, to be popular.

Being ten years old, I did not question this ambition, but I did wonder how on earth I was going to realize it. Though I only stood twenty yards from the heart of the kingdom, I felt a thousand miles removed from the rank and prestige of its citizens. How could I bridge such a gap, knowing I might be stared at, or laughed at, or belittled to a speck so small that I could no longer be seen by the naked eye? And as I stood on that playground, torn between fear and ambition, those twenty yards began to recede from view, and I knew that I

must either step forward now, or retreat forever to a life of bitter companions and three-leaf clovers.

I took a deep breath and then, with great trepidation, crossed the twenty longest yards I had ever walked in my life and found myself standing a few feet from the outer circle of what I hoped was my destiny. I lowered my head a little, so as not to draw attention to myself, and watched and listened.

Mitch Brockman, a lean, long-faced comic, considered by many to be the funniest boy in the fourth grade, was in the middle of a story that had something to do with Tijuana and a wiener mobile. I wasn't sure what the story was about, but there was a lot of body English and innuendo, all of which the crowd seemed to find absolutely hilarious.

I noticed that every time Mitch said something funny, he eyed Sean Owens to see if he was laughing. He was. Silently. His mouth was open, but it was the laughter of the other boys that filled the silence. I realized then that Mitch was Sean's jester. As long as he could make Sean laugh, he was assured a prominent position in the group.

I wondered what *my* position in the group might be. I certainly wasn't a great athlete, student, or ladies' man, but I did have a sense of humor. Maybe I could be the *second*-funniest boy in the fourth grade. My thoughts went no further because the bell ending recess rang. But that night, just before I fell asleep, I saw myself standing in the center of the popular boys telling

the funniest stories anyone had ever heard. I saw Sean Owens doubled up with laughter. I saw myself triumphant.

I returned to the group every recess, for three days. I stood, unnoticed, just outside the outer circle, waiting for my moment, for the one joke or wisecrack that would make me popular. I knew that I would only get one chance to prove myself, and that if I failed, I would be sent back to the stables. And so, with the single-mindedness of a scientist, I listened to the jokes the other boys made, hoping to align my comic sensibilities with theirs. Now and then I found myself on the verge of saying something, but every time I opened my mouth to speak, Mitch would launch into another routine, and my moment passed, and I had to resign myself to yet another day in the dark.

I did not know then that popularity has a life span, and that Mitch's time was about to run out.

It is a sad fact of life that the clothes a child wears and how he wears them often determine his rank in school society. I knew it, Sean Owens knew it, everyone in school knew it. So maybe it was carelessness, or temporary insanity, or a subconscious desire to step back into the stress-free shadows of anonymity that caused Mitch Brockman to wear a yellow shirt with a yellow pair of pants. He might have gotten away with it if I hadn't left for school that same morning unaware

that one folded cuff of my jeans was noticeably lower than the other. As it was, the two of us were on a collision course that only one of us would survive.

At recess on that fateful day, I took my customary place a foot from the popular boys (wondering if I would ever get a chance to prove myself) and listened to Mitch tell another variation of his story about the wiener mobile. I pretended to enjoy this story as much as the others, while my mind strayed to a dream world where I did not have to feel so out of place, and Mitch and Sean and I were the best of friends. And then, with a suddenness that jarred me back to reality, Mitch Brockman, a boy who had never noticed me, never seemed to know or care that I was alive, turned to me, pointed at my uneven pants, and said, "Someone needs a ruler."

This was, perhaps, the wittiest remark he had ever made, and I froze. With four words he had devastated all my aspirations, defined me as a fool, and all but condemned me to a life of shame and obscurity. I could see my future, my boyhood itself, crumbling to dust, and as I heard the laughter and felt the heat of the spotlight upon me, I pointed at Mitch's yellow pants and shirt and said, "Someone else needs a mirror. You look like a canary." Then, with the grace of a magician's assistant, I raised my left arm in a presentational gesture and said, "Boys, I give you Tweety Bird."

And it was all over. As the volume of the laughter doubled, Mitch seemed to vanish, and that day, on that playground, Sean Owens's laughter was heard for the

first time. In an instant, Mitch Brockman became Tweety Bird, and I, an absolute nonentity, became somebody. And then somebody special. Someone to seek out. Someone to follow. Sean Owens's first jester and best friend. The entire transformation was complete in a matter of months.

During this time Mitch became a less and less vocal part of the group, telling fewer and fewer stories, until finally, the following year, he was gone—to another school perhaps, or another state, or another country. I never knew. No one knew because no one noticed—no one had called him for months. But *my* phone rang. *My* weekends were filled with sleep-overs and baseball games and bowling parties and bicycle races and more new friends than I knew what to do with.

And I did not trust one of them, because I knew then that I was standing on sand and was only a yellow shirt and pair of pants away from the oak trees where the two Allans were still looking for four-leaf clovers.

the fight

It began with a basketball game. Mike Dichter and I went up for the same rebound, and I accidentally stuck my elbow in his chest. Then Mike stuck his elbow in my chest, pointed a finger at me, and told me to watch out. In those days I had a reputation for toughness to maintain, so I told him that *he* better watch out, and on the next rebound neither of us watched out and both of us got elbows in the chest. Then we started shoving each other under the basket and pointing fingers and making threatening faces, which was fine with me because looking threatening was one of the things I did best.

Before things could get out of hand, however, gym ended, and Mike and I glared at each other and went back to our respective homerooms.

Things probably would have taken a peaceful turn if I hadn't walked home with Kevin Cox after school and told him that the next time Mike and I played basketball I was really going to throw some elbows, and if he, Mike, didn't like it, I would fight him anytime, any-

where. I don't know why I said this. Perhaps I was thinking of the Mike I had known a year before. Perhaps I was thinking of the thin, gullible, good-natured Mike who had since grown four inches, gained fifteen pounds, and become as humorless and menacing as a drill sergeant.

Kevin looked at me doubtfully.

"Do you really think you can take him?" he asked me.

Since Kevin had always been one of my most loyal and servile followers, I was astonished by his doubt in my physical prowess.

"I know I can take him," I said.

"He's three inches taller than you," Kevin said.

"So?"

"He's really strong."

"I'm really strong."

Kevin shrugged. "Okay," he said, "but I think Mike could take you."

Now it was my turn to shrug. It was also my turn to lay a condescending hand upon Kevin's shoulder and leave him to ponder his absurd and traitorous notions.

The next day in school everything proceeded as usual. I listened to the teachers, took notes, fell asleep, made a few uncalled-for remarks, and gazed at Denise Young's legs.

During lunch I was sitting with a tableful of friends, talking and listening in my usual superior way, when I heard Mike Dichter say, "Hey, buddy!" Somehow I knew that he meant me. Somehow I also knew that all

kinds of jigs were up and that something momentous was going to happen. I turned to look at him.

"I hear you want to fight me," he said.

"That's right," I said.

"I'll meet you after school."

"I'll be there," I said. Then he walked away, and I discovered two interesting things about myself. The first was that the idea of fighting terrified me, and the second was that in moments of extreme fear my body produced ice-cold sweat.

Someone said something to me, and I smiled and nodded. Someone said something else to me, and I smiled and nodded at that too. Perhaps they were giving me advice. Perhaps they were telling me to stay low and lead with my left. I stood up, without really knowing I was standing up, and walked from the cafeteria to the playground. I had never felt so lonely or so frightened in my life. Somehow I had taken a wrong turn and wound up in the wrong day, in the wrong body, with the wrong future. Somehow, in three hours, I was going to be in a real fight with real fists, and there was no way out of it.

My biggest problem, I knew, was that I didn't hate Mike or even dislike him. I had no animal rage to ball my hands into fists and thrust them into action—no deep-seated envy or resentment to impel me toward him with the object of destruction. All I had was fear and pride, which is a pretty poor combination as far as fighting is concerned, because all pride could do was guarantee that I show up for the fight, and all fear could do was guarantee that I lose it.

The rest of the day passed in a haze of anticipation and dread. I sat through my classes, a smiling silent shell of my former self, and tried to look as casual and confident as possible. Now and then I would look up at the clock and realize that the fight was only one hour and forty-nine minutes away—one hour and forty minutes... I tried to tell myself that it might only be a one- or two-punch fight, that maybe Mike would throw a punch and I would throw a punch and we would both smile, throw our arms around each other, and become friends for life. But I knew that it would not be a one- or two-punch fight. No. It would be a fight to some extreme and horrifying limit—a fight to unconsciousness or hospitalization or reconstructive surgery.

During my walks from class to class I discovered that most of the eighth grade had taken sides and that my side consisted of me, a foreign exchange student named Hans, and two girls whose hearts I had not yet broken. The rest of my peers were massed behind Mike, eager to see me put in my place once and for all.

The last class of the day was shop. We were all told by our teacher, Mr. Bledsoe, to work on our special projects. My special project was a skateboard, so I began sanding its nose and trying with all my might not to think about the fight. It is said that there is nothing like working with wood to take one's mind off a problem, but it could also be said that there is nothing like a problem to take one's mind off working with wood. No matter how intensely I sanded the nose of my skateboard, the fight was always with me, and the air

around me seemed as thin as Alpine or Himalayan air.

I tried to tell myself that in three hours it would all be over, that I would be in my own house, in my own room, and the fight would be a memory. But three hours would not be enough if I lost the fight. A month would not be enough to heal my humiliation. What would be enough? I asked myself. Six months? No. A year? Yes. A year would be enough. In a year I would be able to look back on this day and smile, or perhaps laugh. In a year the fight would be a distant memory, and I would be a different person with different friends and new reasons to feel confident and proud.

So I closed my eyes and asked God to please make it a year later—to please take me out of this year and place me in the next. With my eyes closed I almost believed that time was racing past me, that eggs were being laid, chicks were being hatched, growing plump, laying their own eggs, and dying.

Unfortunately, when I opened my eyes, I knew that I was still thirteen, still in shop class, and that the fight was waiting to be fought. I thanked God anyway, guessing I had prayed the wrong prayer, looked at the clock, and saw that I had ten minutes left. I did not even try to sand my skateboard those last ten minutes. Instead I drifted into a pleasant state of suspended animation where there was no joy, no fear, no pride, no regret. During this time my pulse rate and respiration dropped, the blood in my veins slowed to a crawl, and I believe I stopped aging.

And then the bell rang, and my time was up.

We were to meet in front of the school. When I got there, I saw a crowd of fifty or sixty people awaiting my arrival. Under different circumstances I would have been pleased by the turnout, but the hopelessness of my position offset whatever theatrical lift I might have felt. I did, however, smile. I was, after all, the other half of the act and was not about to look somber or scared or penitent for anyone.

I saw Mike Dichter standing fifteen or twenty feet away, looking as menacing as ever. He fixed his eyes on me for a moment, then kissed his girlfriend, Linda Lieban. I had foolishly broken up with Linda ten months before. Now, as Mike was kissing her, she looked at me as though she would soon have her revenge.

And then, before I knew it, someone said, "Let's go," and everyone started walking toward the park two blocks away. Strangely, I felt not like a boy on his way to a fight but like a king on his way to the gallows. These were not my classmates before me but peasants in revolt. My wife had already been beheaded, my children sold for horses, my servants set free.

I tried to put everything in perspective, to assure myself that it was only a fight and that losing was no disgrace. And maybe I wouldn't lose. Maybe I was one of those people who did not know his own strength until he was confronted. Maybe when I was facing Mike, some inherited ancient instinct would propel me toward his throat and give me the strength of ten men. My father was certainly a powerful man. My father, at

certain times, was one of the most powerful and frightening men I knew. Up to that moment, all I thought I had inherited from him was his pride and his nose, but maybe once I was standing face-to-face with Mike Dichter I would discover that I had inherited his blind rage and lion heart as well.

When we got to the park, a short discussion about the rules of the fight took place. First it was decided that kicking and biting should not be allowed, then that kicking should be allowed, but not scratching. During this time I was standing by a stone water fountain, breathing slowly and wondering when the blood of my father and his father and his father's father was going to show itself. I still couldn't summon enough rage or fury or indignation to make me want to fight Mike or anyone else. All I could do was hope that I was subconsciously feeling those things and was merely biding my time.

"A fight's a fight," I heard someone say. "No bullshit rules."

This motion was contemplated, then carried: Everything allowed. No bullshit rules.

"Should we take our shirts off?" I asked, hoping to postpone things a little longer.

"Whatever," someone said.

And with that all the decisions were made, and there was nothing for Mike and me to do but face each other and fight. Tim Hamilton, our referee, walked us to a clearing and told us to shake hands and fight whenever we were ready. For a moment Mike and I just looked at

each other. Then Mike crouched a little, I do not know why, and began to circle me. I knew I should move in and attack immediately, but I was rooted where I stood.

"Fight!" someone said. And now Mike began to advance and kick karate style. The kicks not only served to display his formidable kicking skills but were also a superior defensive and offensive weapon. In order to get to Mike, I would have to find some way to get around his kicks, and in order to do that, I would have to be someone who knew how to fight. My only choice, therefore, was to look unworried and back up, which is what I did. Mike, however, was advancing steadily, which meant that I could either continue backing up until I reached the bus stop on Santa Monica Boulevard or stand my ground and see what happened. Pride demanded that I choose the latter, just in time for Mike to kick me on the thigh. I turned sideways to present a thinner target, bent my knees a little, and took a hard kick to the ribs.

And then things began to happen very quickly. In an instant Mike was on me, and my legs buckled, and we were wrestling on the ground. In an effort to prove that I could fight as dirty as anyone, I gingerly grabbed his groin and discovered that I had neither the will nor the strength to squeeze.

"So that's how you want to play?" Mike said, grabbing *my* groin a good deal less gingerly and wrestling me onto my back. Somehow I was able to get out from under him, and a great deal of grappling, kicking,

scratching, and punching ensued while the crowd yelled for either Mike or me to do something that I could not quite make out. Then I saw blood on my shirt and wondered who was bleeding. Before I could find out, Mike was on top of me and my arms were pinned under his knees and he was hitting me very hard in the face. Curiously, I hardly felt the punches. All I felt was the dull impact of the blows, and all I heard were the shrieks and hollers of the crowd, along with the *thump, thump, thump* of fist hitting cheek, ear, chin, forehead, and occasionally mouth. For some reason I was very relaxed. Perhaps because I sensed that I was only getting what I deserved. After all, I had feasted on my own glory and egotism for three years. The check was bound to come.

"Kill him!" I heard Linda Lieban cry. "Kill him!" So Mike reached back and hit me on the side of the head with the hardest punch he had thrown yet.

"Give?" he said.

I shook my head.

"Okay," he said, reaching back to kill me again. He repeated this eight or nine times, and after each punch he said, "Give?" and I said, "No," or shook my head, and he reached back again.

And then, for an instant, I had had enough. For one brief moment the blood of my father and his father and his father's father welled up within me, and I put my hands under Mike's knees, lifted him in the air, held him there, and threw him off me. The crowd gasped, and for a moment Mike looked surprised, even scared.

I stood up to my full height, and the full height of my pride and dignity, but I did not know what to do next. I was no more willing to fight now than I had been before; and the moment passed, and my fury ebbed, and before I knew it, Mike was on top of me picking up where he had left off.

Soon I could not distinguish one punch from another, and my ears burned, and the noises around me seemed to be coming from the other end of a hollow tube. I saw glimpses of faces, but I did not see friends or former friends—all I saw was a crowd, and all I heard was a crowd's noise. I knew it was all over—the love notes, the phone calls, the envy and adulation. Each punch robbed me of another friend, another heart, another follower. From here on out it would just be me, and my TV, and my memories of glory.

And then, one by one, or two by two, the lights went out in my mind, and Mike's legs were around my stomach and I couldn't breathe.

"Give?" he said.

I shook my head.

He squeezed harder. "Give?"

Why not? the last light in my mind said. *All I'm giving him is the fight.* So I gave: I gave him the fight, the love notes, the phone calls, the envy, the adulation, and the arrogant hull of who I had been.

For a moment I felt very light, almost weightless.

As soon as she arrived she went straight to the kitchen to see if the monkey was there. It was: what a relief. She wouldn't have liked to admit that her mother had been right. "Monkeys at a birthday?" her mother had sneered. Get away with you, believing any nonsense you're told!" She was cross, but not because of the monkey, the girl thought; it's just because of the party.

"I don't like you going," she told her. "It's a rich people's party."

"Rich people go to Heaven too," said the girl, who studied religion at school.

"Get away with Heaven," said the mother. "The problem with you, young lady, is that you like to fart higher than your ass."

The girl didn't approve of the way her mother spoke. She was barely nine, and one of the best in her class.

"I'm going because I've been invited," she said. "And I've been invited because Luciana is my friend. So there."

"Ah yes, your friend," her mother grumbled. She paused. "Listen, Rosaura," she said at last. "That one's not your friend. You know what you are to them? The maid's daughter, that's what." Rosaura blinked hard: she wasn't going to cry. Then she yelled:

"Shut up! You know nothing about being friends!"

Every afternoon she used to go to Luciana's house and they would both finish their homework while Rosaura's mother did the cleaning. They had their tea in the kitchen and they told each other secrets. Rosaura loved everything in the big house, and she also loved the people who lived there.

"I'm going because it will be the most lovely party in the whole world, Luciana told me it would. There will be a magician, and he will bring a monkey and everything."

The mother swung around to take a good look at her child, and pompously put her hands on her hips. "Monkeys at a birthday?" she said. "Get away with you, believing any nonsense you're told!"

Rosaura was deeply offended. She thought it unfair of her mother to accuse other people of being liars simply because they were rich. Rosaura too wanted to be rich, of course. If one day she managed to live in a beautiful palace, would her mother stop loving her? She felt very sad. She wanted to go to that party more than anything else in the world.

"I'll die if I don't go," she whispered, almost without moving her lips.

And she wasn't sure whether she had been heard, but on the morning of the party she discovered that her mother had starched her Christmas dress. And in the afternoon, after washing her hair, her mother rinsed it in apple vinegar so that it would be all nice and shiny. Before going out, Rosaura admired herself in the mirror, with her white dress and glossy hair, and thought she looked terribly pretty.

Señora Ines also seemed to notice. As soon as she saw her, she said: "How lovely you look today, Rosaura."

Rosaura gave her starched skirt a slight toss with her hands and walked into the party with a firm step. She said hello to Luciana and asked about the monkey. Luciana put on a secretive look and whispered into Rosaura's ear: "He's in the kitchen. But don't tell anyone, because it's a surprise."

Rosaura wanted to make sure. Carefully she entered the kitchen and there she saw it: deep in thought, inside its cage. It looked so funny that the girl stood there for a while, watching it, and later, every so often, she would slip out of the party unseen and go and admire it. Rosaura was the only one allowed into the kitchen. Señora Ines had said: "You yes, but not the others, they're much too boisterous, they might break something." Rosaura had never broken anything. She even managed the jug of orange juice, carrying it from the kitchen into the dining room. She held it carefully and didn't spill a single drop. And Senora Ines had said: "Are you sure you can manage a jug as big as that?" Of course she could manage. She wasn't a butterfingers, like the others. Like that blonde girl with the bow in her hair. As soon as she saw Rosaura, the girl with the bow had said:

"And you? Who are you?"

"I'm a friend of Luciana," said Rosaura.

"No," said the girl with the bow, "you are not a friend of Luciana because I'm her cousin and I know all her friends. And I don't know you."

"So what," said Rosaura. "I come here every afternoon with my mother and we do our homework together."

"You and your mother do your homework together?" asked the girl, laughing.

"I and Luciana do our homework together," said Rosaura, very seriously.

The girl with the bow shrugged her shoulders.

"That's not being friends," she said. "Do you go to school together?"

"No."

"So where do you know her from?" said the girl, getting impatient. Rosaura remembered her mother's words perfectly. She took a deep breath.

"I'm the daughter of the employee," she said. Her mother had said very clearly: "If someone asks, you say you're the daughter of the employee; that's all." She also told her to add: "And proud of it." But Rosaura thought that never in her life would she dare say something of the sort.

"What employee?" said the girl with the bow. "Employee in a shop?"

"No," said Rosaura angrily. "My mother doesn't sell anything in any shop, so there."

"So how come she's an employee?" said the girl with the bow. Just then Señora Ines arrived saying shh shh, and asked Rosaura if she wouldn't mind helping serve out the hot dogs, as she knew the house so much better than the others.

"See?" said Rosaura to the girl with the bow, and when no one was looking she kicked her in the shin.

Apart from the girl with the bow, all the others were delightful. The one she liked best was Luciana, with her golden birthday crown; and then the boys. Rosaura won the sack race, and nobody managed to catch her when they played tag. When they split into two teams to play charades, all the boys wanted her for their side. Rosaura felt she had never been so happy in all her life.

But the best was still to come. The best came after Luciana blew out the candies. First the cake. Señora Ines had asked her to help pass the cake around, and Rosaura had enjoyed the task immensely, because everyone called out to her, shouting "Me, me!" Rosaura remembered a story in which there was a queen who had the power of life or death over her subjects. She had always loved that, having the power of life or death. To Luciana and the boys she gave the largest pieces, and to the girl with the bow she gave a slice so thin one could see through it.

After the cake came the magician, tall and bony, with a fine red cape. A true magician: he could untie handkerchiefs by blowing on them and make a chain with links that had no openings. He could guess what cards were pulled out from a pack, and the monkey was his assistant. He called the monkey "partner." "Let's see here, partner," he would say, "turn over a card." And,

"Don't run away, partner: time to work now."

The final trick was wonderful. One of the children had to hold the monkey in his arms and the magician said he would make him disappear.

"What, the boy?" they all shouted.

"No, the monkey!" shouted back the magician.

Rosaura thought that this was truly the most amusing party in the whole world.

The magician asked a small fat boy to come and help, but the small fat boy got frightened almost at once and dropped the monkey on the floor. The magician picked him up carefully, whispered something in his ear, and the monkey nodded almost as if he understood.

"You mustn't be so unmanly, my friend," the magician said to the fat boy.

"What's unmanly?" said the fat boy.

The magician turned around as if to look for spies.

"A sissy," said the magician. "Go sit down."

Then he stared at all the faces, one by one. Rosaura felt her heart tremble.

"You with the Spanish eyes," said the magician. And everyone saw that he was pointing at her.

She wasn't afraid, Neither holding the monkey, nor when the magician made him vanish; not even when, at the end, the magician flung his red cape over Rosaura's head and uttered a few magic words . . . and the monkey reappeared, chattering happily, in her arms. The children clapped furiously. And before Rosaura returned to her seat, the magician said:

"Thank you very much, my little countess."

She was so pleased with the compliment that a while later, when her mother came to fetch her, that was the first thing she told her. "I helped the magician and he said to me, Thank you very much, my little countess."

It was strange because up to then Rosaura had thought that she was angry with her mother. All along Rosaura had imagined that she would say to her: "See that the monkey wasn't a lie?" But instead she was so thrilled that she told her mother all about the wonderful magician.

Her mother tapped her on the head and said: "So now we're a countess!"

But one could see that she was beaming. And now they both stood in the entrance, because a moment ago Señora Ines, smiling, had said: "Please wait here a second." Her mother suddenly seemed worried.

"What is it?" she asked Rosaura.

"What is what?" said Rosaura. "It's nothing; she just wants to get the presents for those who are leaving, see?"

She pointed at the fat boy and at a girl with pigtails who were also waiting there, next to their mothers. And she explained about the presents. She knew, because she had been watching those who left before her. When one of the girls was about to leave, Señora Ines would give her a bracelet. When a boy left, Señora Ines gave him a yo-yo. Rosaura preferred the yo-yo because it sparkled, but she didn't mention that to her mother. Her mother might have said: "So why don't you ask for one, you blockhead?" That's what her mother was like. Rosaura didn't feel like explaining that she'd be horribly ashamed to be the odd one out. Instead she said:

"I was the best-behaved at the party."

And she said no more because Señora Ines came out into the hall with two bags, one pink and one blue.

First she went up to the fat boy, gave him a yo-yo out of the blue bag, and the fat boy left with his mother. Then she went up to the girl and gave her a bracelet out of the pink bag, and the girl with the pigtails left as well.

Finally she came up to Rosaura and her mother. She had a big smile on her face and Rosaura liked that. Señora Ines looked down at her, then looked up at her mother, and then said something that made Rosaura proud:

"What a marvelous daughter you have, Herminia."

For an instant, Rosaura thought that she'd give her two presents: the bracelet and the yo-yo. Señora Ines bent down as if about to look for something. Rosaura also leaned forward, stretching out her arm. But she never completed the movement.

Señora Ines didn't look in the pink bag. Nor did she look in the bluebag. Instead she rummaged in her purse. In her hand appeared two bills.

"You really and truly, earned this," she said handing them over.

"Thank you for all your help, my pet."

Rosaura felt her arms stiffen, stick close to her body, and then she noticed her mother's hand on her shoulder. Instinctively she pressed herself against her mother's body. That was all. Except her eyes. Rosaura's eyes had a cold, clear look that fixed itself on Señora Ines's face.

Señora Ines, motionless, stood there with her hand outstretched. As if she didn't dare draw it back. As if the slightest change might shatter an infinitely delicate balance.

“Ponies,” by Kij Johnson (winner of the 2010 Nebula Award for Short Story)

The invitation card has a Western theme. Along its margins, cartoon girls in cowboy hats chase a herd of wild Ponies. The Ponies are no taller than the girls, bright as butterflies, fat, with short round-tipped unicorn horns and small fluffy wings. At the bottom of the card, newly caught Ponies mill about in a corral. The girls have lassoed a pink-and-white Pony. Its eyes and mouth are surprised round Os. There is an exclamation mark over its head.

The little girls are cutting off its horn with curved knives. Its wings are already removed, part of a pile beside the corral.

You and your Pony ____ and Sunny’s name is handwritten here, in puffy letters ____ are invited to a cutting-out party with TheOtherGirls! If we like you, and if your Pony does okay, we’ll let you hang out with us.

Sunny says, “I can’t wait to have friends!” She reads over Barbara’s shoulder, rose-scented breath woofling through Barbara’s hair. They are in the backyard next to Sunny’s pink stable.

Barbara says, “Do you know what you want to keep?”

Sunny’s tiny wings are a blur as she hops into the air, loops, and then hovers, legs curled under her. “Oh, being able to talk, absolutely! Flying is great, but talking is way better!” She drops to the grass. “I don’t know why any Pony would keep her horn! It’s not like it does anything!”

This is the way it’s always been, as long as there have been Ponies. All ponies have wings. All Ponies have horns. All Ponies can talk. Then all Ponies go to a cutting-out party, and they give up two of the three, because that’s what has to

happen if a girl is going to fit in with TheOtherGirls. Barbara's never seen a Pony that still had her horn or wings after her cutting-out party.

Barbara sees TheOtherGirls' Ponies peeking in the classroom windows just before recess or clustered at the bus stop after school. They're baby pink and lavender and daffodil-yellow, with flossy manes in ringlets, and tails that curl to the ground. When not at school and cello lessons and ballet class and soccer practice and play group and the orthodontist's, TheOtherGirls spend their days with their Ponies.

The party is at TopGirl's house. She has a mother who's a pediatrician and a father who's a cardiologist and a small barn and giant trees shading the grass where the Ponies are playing games. Sunny walks out to them nervously. They silently touch her horn and wings with their velvet noses, and then the Ponies all trot out to the lilac barn at the bottom of the pasture, where a bale of hay has been broken open.

TopGirl meets Barbara at the fence. "That's your Pony?" she says without greeting. "She's not as pretty as Starblossom."

Barbara is defensive. "She's beautiful!" This is a misstep so she adds, "Yours is so pretty!" And TopGirl's Pony *is* pretty: her tail is every shade of purple and glitters with stars. But Sunny's tail is creamy white and shines with honey-colored light, and Barbara knows that Sunny's the most beautiful Pony ever.

TopGirl walks away, saying over her shoulder, "There's Rock Band in the family room and a bunch of TheOtherGirls are hanging out on the deck and Mom bought some cookies and there's Coke Zero and diet Red Bull and diet lemonade."

“Where are you?” Barbara asks.

“*I’m* outside,” TopGirl says, so Barbara gets a Crystal Light and three frosted raisin-oatmeal cookies and follows her. TheOtherGirls outside are listening to an iPod plugged into speakers and playing Wii tennis and watching the Ponies play HideAndSeek and Who’sPrettiest and ThisIsTheBestGame. They are all there, SecondGirl and SuckUpGirl and EveryoneLikesHerGirl and the rest. Barbara only speaks when she thinks she’ll get it right.

And then it’s time. TheOtherGirls and their silent Ponies collect in a ring around Barbara and Sunny. Barbara feels sick.

TopGirl says to Barbara, “What did she pick?”

Sunny looks scared but answers her directly. “I would rather talk than fly or stab things with my horn.”

TopGirl says to Barbara, “That’s what Ponies always say.” She gives Barbara a curved knife with a blade as long as a woman’s hand.

“*Me?*” Barbara says. “I thought someone else did it. A grown-up.”

TopGirl says, “Everyone does it for their own Pony. I did it for Starblossom.”

In silence Sunny stretches out a wing.

It’s not the way it would be, cutting a real pony. The wing comes off easily, smooth as plastic, and the blood smells like cotton candy at the fair. There’s a shiny trembling oval where the wing was, as if Barbara is cutting rose-flavored Turkish Delight in half and sees the pink under the powdered sugar. She thinks, *It’s sort of pretty*, and throws up.

Sunny shivers, her eyes shut tight. Barbara cuts off the second wing and lays it beside the first.

The horn is harder, like paring a real pony's hooves. Barbara's hand slips and she cuts Sunny, and there's more cotton-candy blood. And then the horn lies in the grass beside the wings.

Sunny drops to her knees. Barbara throws the knife down and falls beside her, sobbing and hiccuping. She scrubs her face with the back of her hand and looks up at the circle.

Starblossom touches the knife with her nose, pushes it toward Barbara with one lilac hoof. TopGirl says, "Now the voice. You have to take away her voice."

"But I already cut off her wings and her horn!" Barbara throws her arms around Sunny's neck, protecting it. "Two of the three, you said!"

"That's the cutting-out, yeah," TopGirl says. "That's what *you* do to be OneOfUs. But the Ponies pick their *own* friends. And that costs, too." Starblossom tosses her violet mane. For the first time, Barbara sees that there is a scar shaped like a smile on her throat. All the Ponies have one.

"I won't!" Barbara tells them all, but even as she cries until her face is caked with snot and tears, she knows she will, and when she's done crying, she picks up the knife and pulls herself upright.

Sunny stands up beside her on trembling legs. She looks very small without her horn, her wings. Barbara's hands are slippery, but she tightens her grip.

"No," Sunny says suddenly. "Not even for this."

Sunny spins and runs, runs for the fence in a gallop as fast and beautiful as a real pony's; but there are more of the others, and they are bigger, and Sunny doesn't

have her wings to fly or her horn to fight. They pull her down before she can jump the fence into the woods beyond. Sunny cries out and then there is nothing, only the sound of pounding hooves from the tight circle of Ponies.

TheOtherGirls stand, frozen. Their blind faces are turned toward the Ponies.

The Ponies break their circle, trot away. There is no sign of Sunny, beyond a spray of cotton-candy blood and a coil of her glowing mane torn free and fading as it falls to the grass.

Into the silence TopGirl says, “Cookies?” She sounds fragile and false.

TheOtherGirls crowd into the house, chattering in equally artificial voices. They start up a game, drink more Diet Coke.

Barbara stumbles after them into the family room. “What are you playing?” she says, uncertainly.

“Why are *you* here?” FirstGirl says, as if noticing her for the first time. “You’re not OneOfUs.”

TheOtherGirls nod. “You don’t have a pony.”