

The Ransom of Red Chief

Short Story by O. Henry

Is any plan FOOLPROOF?



INDIANA STANDARDS

READING STANDARDS

8.2.9 Make reasonable statements and draw conclusions about a text, supporting them with accurate examples.

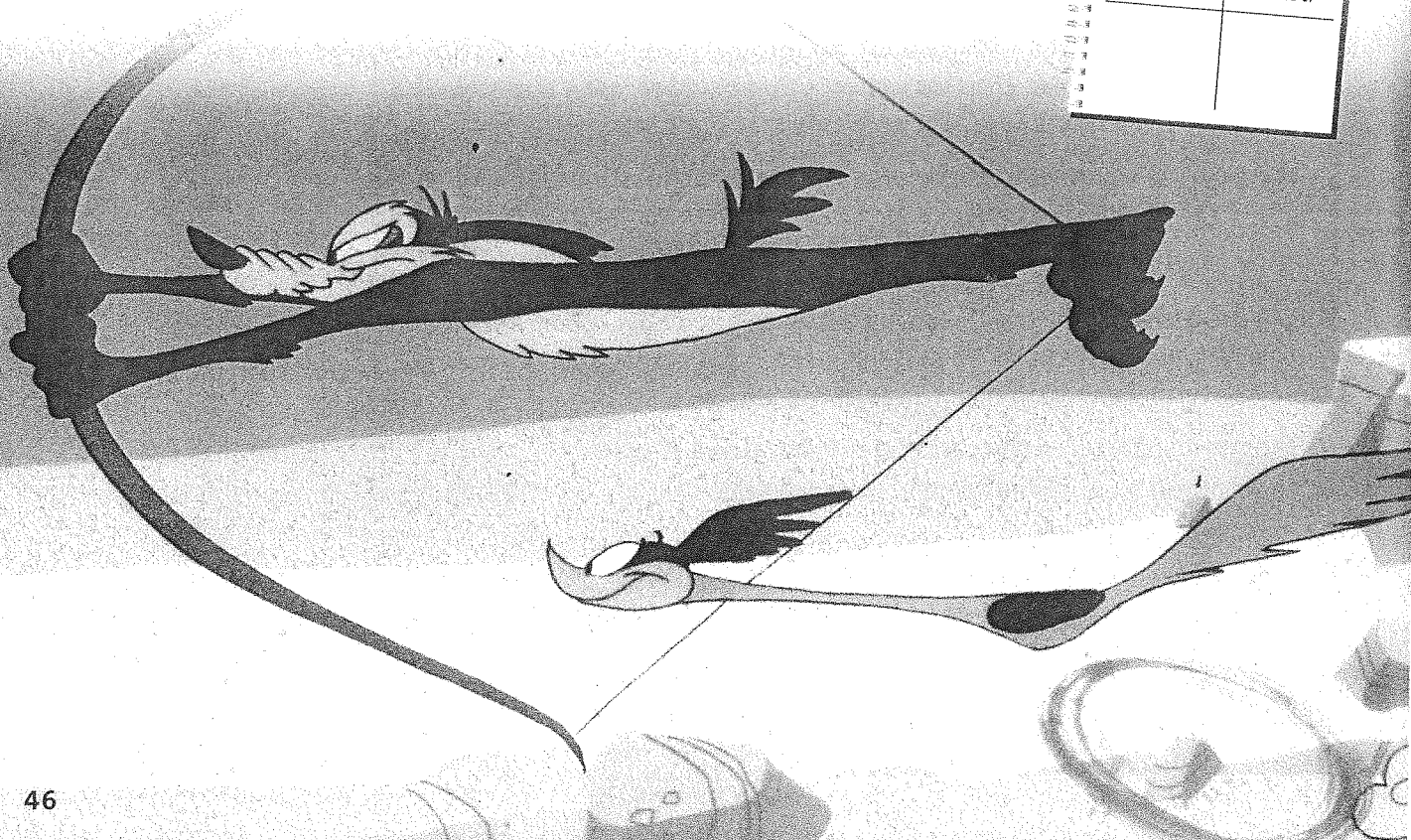
8.3.2 Evaluate the structural elements of the plot, such as subplots, parallel episodes, and climax; the plot's development; and the way in which conflicts are (or are not) addressed and resolved.

KEY IDEA You can make a list. You can check it twice. You can go over every last detail of a plan in your mind. But even when you think you've thought of everything, **the unexpected** can change the outcome in surprising, terrible, or sometimes hysterically funny ways. In the story you are about to read, the main characters have a plan for making some quick money, but things don't work out the way they had hoped.

LIST IT With a partner, plan a surprise party for a friend by making a list of what you need to do. Then, next to each item, write down something unexpected that could possibly happen to spoil that part of the plan.

Lu's Party!

E-mail our group to invite them.	Forget to take Lu off the list.



Author Online

LITERARY ANALYSIS: CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

A story's plot centers on **conflicts**, or struggles between opposing forces. By the end of the story, the conflicts are usually **resolved**, or settled. For example, a fight between two characters might be resolved when one character wins and one character loses. As you read "The Ransom of Red Chief," pay attention to the conflicts and note how they are resolved.

READING STRATEGY: PREDICT

When you watch TV shows or read books, do you ever try to guess what will happen next? If you do, you're making **predictions**. As you read this story, use clues from the text and your own common sense to make predictions. Keep track of whether your predictions were right, or whether you were surprised by the way events unfolded.

My Prediction	Actual Event	Correct or Surprised?
The boy will fight back when kidnapped.	Boy fights back.	correct

Review: Make Inferences

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

O. Henry's characters use the words listed, but they aren't as smart as their big vocabulary suggests. See how many words you can match with their numbered definitions.

WORD LIST	collaborate	diatribe	provisions
	commend	impudent	ransom
	comply	proposition	

1. payment demanded for the release of a person or property
2. to act according to a command or request
3. verbal attack; harsh criticism
4. bold and disrespectful
5. to work together on a project
6. to praise
7. necessary supplies, especially food
8. a suggested plan

Unexpected Twists

The early life of O. Henry, whose real name was William Sydney Porter, was filled with ups, downs, and unexpected turns. As a young man, he held many different jobs. He clerked in his uncle's drugstore, worked as a ranch hand, and became a bank teller. Several



O. Henry
1862–1910

years after leaving his position at the bank, he was convicted of having embezzled, or stolen, money from his employer. It certainly wasn't his plan to be put in jail, but that's where he found his next occupation.

A Trailblazing Storyteller While behind bars, Porter began penning stories to help support his young daughter. Upon his release, he changed his name to O. Henry, became a fiction writer, and contributed weekly stories to newspapers. He grew into one of the country's best-loved authors. O. Henry wrote adventure stories, humorous stories, and slice-of-life tales of ordinary people. The stories often had surprise endings. Today, stories that end with an unexpected twist are said to be written in the "O. Henry style."



MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more on O. Henry, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

THE RANSOM OF RED CHIEF

O. HENRY

It looked like a good thing; but wait till I tell you. We were down South, in Alabama—Bill Driscoll and myself—when this kidnaping idea struck us. It was, as Bill afterward expressed it, “during a moment of temporary mental apparition”;¹ but we didn’t find that out till later.

There was a town down there, as flat as a flannel-cake, and called Summit, of course. It contained inhabitants of as undeleterious² and self-satisfied a class of peasantry as ever clustered around a Maypole.

Bill and me had a joint capital of about six hundred dollars, and we needed just two thousand dollars more to pull off a fraudulent town-lot scheme in Western Illinois with. We talked it over on the front steps of the hotel.

Philoprogenitiveness,³ says we, is strong in semi-rural communities; therefore, and for other reasons, a kidnaping project ought to do better there than in the radius of newspapers that send reporters out in plain clothes to stir up talk about such things. We knew that Summit couldn’t get after us with anything stronger than constables, and, maybe, some lackadaisical bloodhounds and a **diatribe** or two in the *Weekly Farmers’ Budget*. So, it looked good.

We selected for our victim the only child of a prominent citizen named Ebenezer Dorset. The father was respectable and tight, a mortgage fancier and a stern, upright collection-plate passer and forecloser. The kid was a boy of ten, with bas-relief⁴ freckles, and hair the color of the cover of the magazine you buy at the news-stand when you want to catch a train. Bill and me figured that Ebenezer would melt down for a **ransom** of two thousand dollars to a cent. But wait till I tell you. **A**

ANALYZE VISUALS
What personality traits might the boy in the painting possess?

diatribe (dī’ə-trīb’) *n.*
bitter, abusive criticism

ransom (răn’səm) *n.*
payment demanded for the release of a person or property

A PREDICT
Reread lines 17–23. Based on Sam’s final comment, do you think the men’s plan will be successful? Add this prediction to your chart.

1. **apparition** (ăp’ə-rīsh’ən): a sudden or unusual sight.
2. **undeleterious** (ŭn-dĕl’ĭ-tīr’ē-əs): harmless.
3. **philoprogenitiveness** (fīl’ō-prō-jĕn’ĭ-tīv-nĕs): love for one’s own children.
4. **bas-relief** (bă’rī-lĕf’): slightly raised.

About two miles from Summit was a little mountain, covered with a dense cedar brake.⁵ On the rear elevation of this mountain was a cave. There we stored **provisions**.

One evening after sundown, we drove in a buggy past old Dorset's house. The kid was in the street, throwing rocks at a kitten on the opposite fence.

"Hey, little boy!" says Bill, "would you like to have a bag of candy and a
30 nice ride?"

The boy catches Bill neatly in the eye with a piece of brick.

"That will cost the old man an extra five hundred dollars," says Bill, climbing over the wheel.

That boy put up a fight like a welter-weight cinnamon bear; but, at last, we got him down in the bottom of the buggy and drove away. We took him up to the cave, and I hitched the horse in the cedar brake. After dark I drove the buggy to the little village, three miles away, where we had hired it, and walked back to the mountain. **B**

Bill was pasting court plaster⁶ over the scratches and bruises on his features.
40 There was a fire burning behind the big rock at the entrance of the cave, and the boy was watching a pot of boiling coffee, with two buzzard tail feathers stuck in his red hair. He points a stick at me when I come up, and says:

"Ha! cursed paleface, do you dare to enter the camp of Red Chief, the terror of the plains?" **C**

"He's all right now," says Bill, rolling up his trousers and examining some bruises on his shins. "We're playing Indian. We're making Buffalo Bill's show look like magic-lantern views⁷ of Palestine in the town hall. I'm Old Hank, the Trapper, Red Chief's captive, and I'm to be scalped at daybreak. By Geronimo! that kid can kick hard."

50 Yes, sir, that boy seemed to be having the time of his life. The fun of camping out in a cave had made him forget that he was a captive himself. He immediately christened me Snake-eye, the Spy, and announced that, when his braves returned from the warpath, I was to be broiled at the stake at the rising of the sun.

Then we had supper; and he filled his mouth full of bacon and bread and gravy, and began to talk. He made a during-dinner speech something like this:

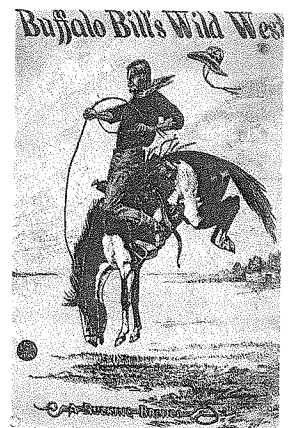
"I like this fine. I never camped out before; but I had a pet 'possum once, and I was nine last birthday. I hate to go to school. Rats ate up sixteen of Jimmy Talbot's aunt's speckled hen's eggs. Are there any real Indians in these
60 woods? I want some more gravy. Does the trees moving make the wind blow? We had five puppies. What makes your nose so red, Hank? My father has lots of money. Are the stars hot? I whipped Ed Walker twice, Saturday. I don't like girls. You dassant⁸ catch toads unless with a string. Do oxen make any noise?"

provisions (prə-vīzh'ənz)
n. necessary supplies;
food

B CONFLICT
Who is in conflict and why?

C PREDICT
How do you think the boy will respond to being held in captivity?

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



In 1883, William F. Cody began producing Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, a traveling extravaganza celebrating and glorifying the American West.

5. **brake:** a thick grouping of trees.

6. **court plaster:** adhesive cloth for covering cuts and scratches.

7. **magic-lantern views:** slides.

8. **dassant:** dare not.

Why are oranges round? Have you got beds to sleep on in this cave? Amos Murray has got six toes. A parrot can talk, but a monkey or a fish can't. How many does it take to make twelve?" **D**

Every few minutes he would remember that he was an Indian, and pick up his stick rifle and tiptoe to the mouth of the cave to search for the scouts of the hated paleface. Now and then he would let out a war whoop that made Old Hank the Trapper shiver. That boy had Bill terrorized from the start.

"Red Chief," says I to the kid, "would you like to go home?"

"Aw, what for?" says he. "I don't have any fun at home. I hate to go to school. I like to camp out. You won't take me back home again, Snake-eye, will you?"

"Not right away," says I. "We'll stay here in the cave awhile."

"All right!" says he. "That'll be fine. I never had such fun in all my life."

We went to bed about eleven o'clock. We spread down some wide blankets and quilts and put Red Chief between us. We weren't afraid he'd run away. He kept us awake for three hours, jumping up and reaching for his rifle and screeching: "Hist! pard," in mine and Bill's ears, as the fancied crackle of a twig or the rustle of a leaf revealed to his young imagination the stealthy approach of the outlaw band. At last, I fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed that I had been kidnapped and chained to a tree by a ferocious pirate with red hair.

Just at daybreak, I was awakened by a series of awful screams from Bill. They weren't yells, or howls, or shouts, or whoops, or yawps, such as you'd expect from a manly set of vocal organs—they were simply indecent, terrifying, humiliating screams, such as women emit when they see ghosts or caterpillars. It's an awful thing to hear a strong, desperate, fat man scream incontinently in a cave at daybreak.

I jumped up to see what the matter was. Red Chief was sitting on Bill's chest, with one hand twined in Bill's hair. In the other he had the sharp case-knife we used for slicing bacon; and he was industriously and realistically trying to take Bill's scalp, according to the sentence that had been pronounced upon him the evening before.

I got the knife away from the kid and made him lie down again. But, from that moment, Bill's spirit was broken. He laid down on his side of the bed, but he never closed an eye again in sleep as long as that boy was with us. I dozed off for a while, but along toward sun-up I remembered that Red Chief had said I was to be burned at the stake at the rising of the sun. I wasn't nervous or afraid; but I sat up and leaned against a rock. **E**

"What you getting up so soon for, Sam?" asked Bill.

"Me?" says I. "Oh, I got a kind of a pain in my shoulder. I thought sitting up would rest it."

"You're a liar!" says Bill. "You're afraid. You was to be burned at sunrise, and you was afraid he'd do it. And he would, too, if he could find a match. Ain't it awful, Sam? Do you think anybody will pay out money to get a little imp like that back home?"

D PREDICT

On your chart, note whether the boy's response to captivity matches your prediction. Do you think the boy's current attitude about his captivity will make the men's plan go more smoothly?

E CONFLICT

In what way has his interaction with the boy affected Bill?

“Sure,” said I. “A rowdy kid like that is just the kind that parents dote on. Now, you and the Chief get up and cook breakfast, while I go up on the top of
110 this mountain and reconnoiter.”

I went up on the peak of the little mountain and ran my eye over the contiguous vicinity. Over toward Summit I expected to see the sturdy yeomanry of the village armed with scythes and pitchforks beating the countryside for the dastardly kidnappers. But what I saw was a peaceful landscape dotted with one man plowing with a dun mule. Nobody was dragging the creek; no couriers dashed hither and yon, bringing tidings of no news to the distracted parents. There was a sylvan¹⁰ attitude of somnolent sleepiness pervading that section of the external outward surface of Alabama
120 discovered that the wolves have borne away the tender lambkin from the fold. Heaven help the wolves!” says I, and I went down the mountain to breakfast.

When I got to the cave I found Bill backed up against the side of it, breathing hard, and the boy threatening to smash him with a rock half as big as a coconut.

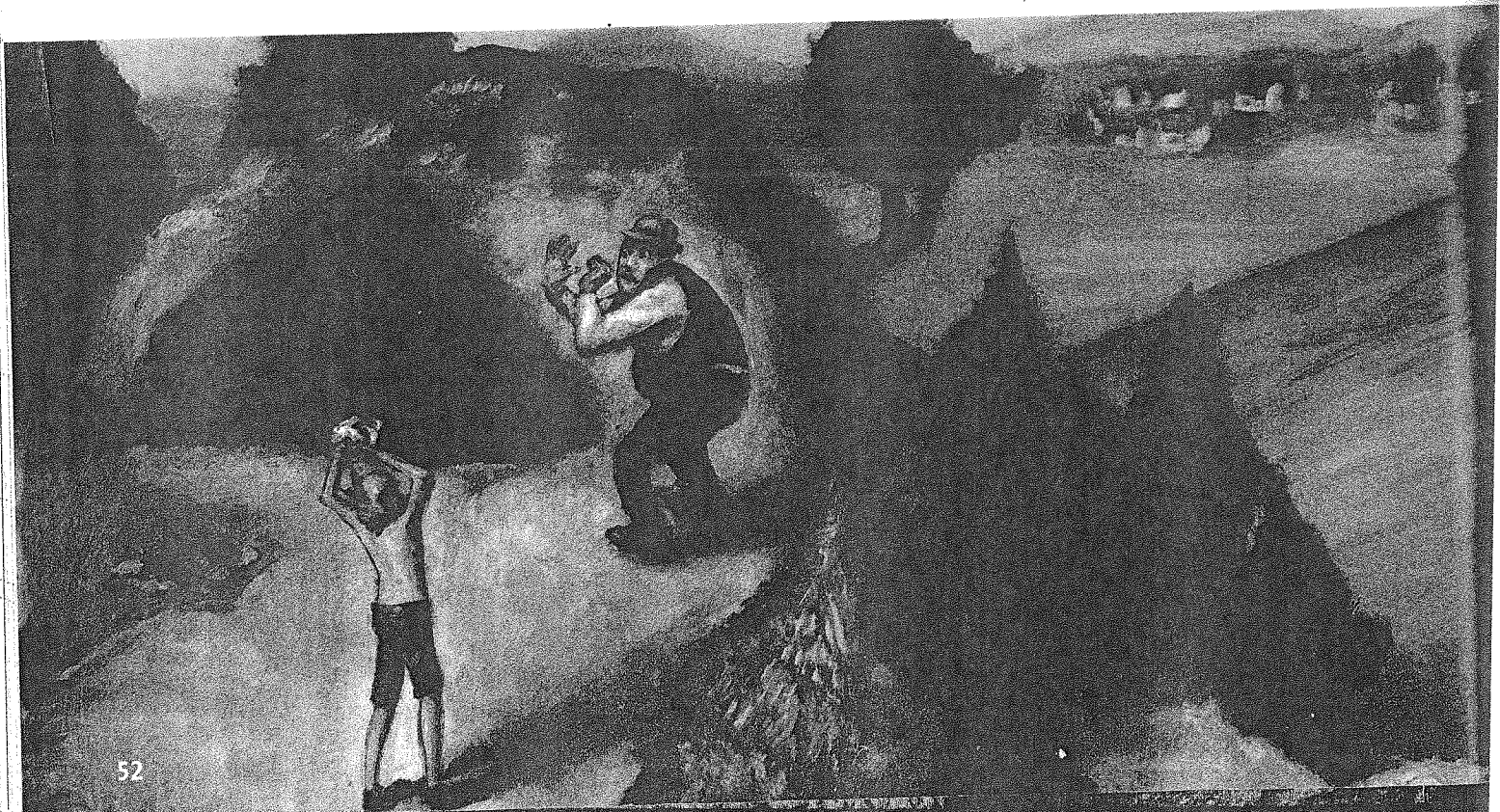
“He put a red-hot boiled potato down my back,” explained Bill, “and then mashed it with his foot; and I boxed his ears. Have you got a gun about you, Sam?”

I took the rock away from the boy and kind of patched up the argument. “I’ll fix you,” says the kid to Bill. “No man ever yet struck the Red Chief but
130 what he got paid for it. You better beware!”

ANALYZE VISUALS
Who seems to be winning the **conflict** in the painting? Tell how you know.

9. **reconnoiter** (rē'kə-noi'tər): to seek information about an enemy's whereabouts.

10. **sylvan** (sīl'vən): like woods or forests.



After breakfast the kid takes a piece of leather with strings wrapped around it out of his pocket and goes outside the cave unwinding it.

“What’s he up to now?” says Bill anxiously. “You don’t think he’ll run away, do you, Sam?”

“No fear of it,” says I. “He don’t seem to be much of a homebody. But we’ve got to fix up some plan about the ransom. There don’t seem to be much excitement around Summit on account of his disappearance; but maybe they haven’t realized yet that he’s gone. His folks may think he’s spending the night with Aunt Jane or one of the neighbors. Anyhow, he’ll be missed today.

140 Tonight we must get a message to his father demanding the two thousand dollars for his return.”

Just then we heard a kind of war whoop, such as David might have emitted when he knocked out the champion Goliath. It was a sling that Red Chief had pulled out of his pocket, and he was whirling it around his head.

I dodged, and heard a heavy thud and a kind of a sigh from Bill, like a horse gives out when you take his saddle off. A rock the size of an egg had caught Bill just behind his left ear. He loosened himself all over and fell in the fire across the frying pan of hot water for washing the dishes. I dragged him out and poured cold water on his head for half an hour.

150 By and by, Bill sits up and feels behind his ear and says: “Sam, do you know who my favorite Biblical character is?”

“Take it easy,” says I. “You’ll come to your senses presently.”

“King Herod,”¹¹ says he. “You won’t go away and leave me here alone, will you, Sam?”

I went out and caught that boy and shook him until his freckles rattled.

“If you don’t behave,” says I, “I’ll take you straight home. Now, are you going to be good, or not?”

“I was only funning,” says he, sullenly. “I didn’t mean to hurt Old Hank.

160 But what did he hit me for? I’ll behave, Snake-eye, if you won’t send me home, and if you’ll let me play the Scout today.”

“I don’t know the game,” says I. “That’s for you and Mr. Bill to decide. He’s your playmate for the day. I’m going away for a while, on business. Now, you come in and make friends with him and say you are sorry for hurting him, or home you go, at once.”

I made him and Bill shake hands, and then I took Bill aside and told him I was going to Poplar Cove, a little village three miles from the cave, and find out what I could about how the kidnapping had been regarded in Summit. Also, I thought it best to send a peremptory letter to old man Dorset that day, demanding the ransom and dictating how it should be paid.

170 “You know, Sam,” says Bill, “I’ve stood by you without batting an eye in earthquakes, fire, and flood—in poker games, dynamite outrages, police raids, train robberies, and cyclones. I never lost my nerve yet till we kidnapped that

D MAKE INFERENCES

How do you think Bill is starting to feel about the plan to get two thousand dollars?

G PREDICT

Do you expect that the boy will behave better going forward? Add the prediction to your chart.

H CONFLICT

In what ways has the conflict changed since the beginning of the story?

11. King Herod: an ancient king of Judea who once ordered the execution of all Bethlehem boys under the age of two.

two-legged skyrocket of a kid. He's got me going. You won't leave me long with him, will you, Sam?"

"I'll be back sometime this afternoon," says I. "You must keep the boy amused and quiet till I return. And now we'll write the letter to old Dorset."

Bill and I got paper and pencil and worked on the letter while Red Chief, with a blanket wrapped around him, strutted up and down, guarding the mouth of the cave. Bill begged me tearfully to make the ransom fifteen hundred dollars instead of two thousand. "I ain't attempting," says he, "to decry¹² the celebrated moral aspect of parental affection, but we're dealing with humans, and it ain't human for anybody to give up two thousand dollars for that forty-pound chunk of freckled wildcat. I'm willing to take a chance at fifteen hundred dollars. You can charge the difference up to me."

So, to relieve Bill, I acceded, and we **collaborated** a letter that ran this way:

EBENEZER DORSET, ESQ.:

We have your boy concealed in a place far from Summit. It is useless for you or the most skillful detectives to attempt to find him. Absolutely, the only terms on which you can have him restored to you are these: We demand fifteen hundred dollars in large bills for his return: the money to be left at midnight at the same spot and in the same box as your reply—as hereinafter described. If you agree to these terms, send your answer in writing by a solitary messenger tonight at half-past eight o'clock. After crossing Owl Creek on the road to Poplar Cove, there are three large trees about a hundred yards apart, close to the fence of the wheat field on the right-hand side. At the bottom of the fence post, opposite the third tree, will be found a small pasteboard box.

The messenger will place the answer in this box and return immediately to Summit.

If you attempt any treachery or fail to **comply** with our demand as stated, you will never see your boy again.

If you pay the money as demanded, he will be returned to you safe and well within three hours. These terms are final, and if you do not accede to them no further communication will be attempted.

TWO DESPERATE MEN. ■

I addressed this letter to Dorset and put it in my pocket. As I was about to start, the kid comes up to me and says:

"Aw, Snake-eye, you said I could play the Scout while you was gone."

"Play it, of course," says I. "Mr. Bill will play with you. What kind of a game is it?"

"I'm the Scout," says Red Chief, "and I have to ride to the stockade to warn the settlers that the Indians are coming. I'm tired of playing Indian myself. I want to be the Scout."

collaborate

(kə-lăb'ə-rāt') v. to work together on a project

comply (kəm-plī') v. to act according to a command or request

■ **PREDICT**

How do you think the boy's father will respond to the men's demands? Add the prediction to your chart.

12. decry: to criticize.

"All right," says I. "It sounds harmless to me. I guess Mr. Bill will help you foil the enemy."

"What am I to do?" asks Bill, looking at the kid suspiciously.

"You are the hoss," says Scout. "Get down on your hands and knees. How can I ride to the stockade without a hoss?"

"You'd better keep him interested," said I, "till we get the scheme going.
220 Loosen up."

Bill gets down on his all fours, and a look comes in his eye like a rabbit's when you catch it in a trap.

"How far is it to the stockade, kid?" he asks, in a husky manner of voice.

"Ninety miles," says the Scout. "And you have to hurry to get there on time. Whoa, now!"

The Scout jumps on Bill's back and digs his heels in his side.

"For Heaven's sake," says Bill, "hurry back, Sam, as soon as you can. I wish we hadn't made the ransom more than a thousand. Say, you quit kicking me or I'll get up and warm you good." ❶

230 I walked over to Poplar Cove and sat around the post office and store, talking with the chawbacons that came in to trade. One whiskerando says that he hears Summit is all upset on account of Elder Ebenezer Dorset's boy having been lost or stolen. That was all I wanted to know. I referred casually to the price of black-eyed peas, posted my letter surreptitiously and came away. The postmaster said the mail carrier would come by in an hour to take the mail on to Summit. ❷

When I got back to the cave Bill and the boy were not to be found. I explored the vicinity of the cave, and risked a yodel or two, but there was no response.

240 So I sat down on a mossy bank to await developments.

In about half an hour I heard the bushes rustle, and Bill wobbled out into the little glade in front of the cave. Behind him was the kid, stepping softly like a scout, with a broad grin on his face. Bill stopped, took off his hat and wiped his face with a red handkerchief. The kid stopped about eight feet behind him.

"Sam," says Bill, "I suppose you think I'm a renegade, but I couldn't help it. I'm a grown person with masculine proclivities and habits of self-defense, but there is a time when all systems of egotism and predominance fail. The boy is gone. I have sent him home. All is off. There was martyrs in old times,"
250 goes on Bill, "that suffered death rather than give up the particular graft they enjoyed. None of 'em ever was subjugated to such supernatural tortures as I have been. I tried to be faithful to our articles of depredation;¹³ but there came a limit." ❸

"What's the trouble, Bill?" I asks him.

"I was rode," says Bill, "the ninety miles to the stockade, not barring an inch. Then, when the settlers was rescued, I was given oats. Sand ain't a

❶ **CONFLICT**

Who seems to be winning the struggle?

❷ **PREDICT**

What do you think will happen now that the letter has been posted?

❸ **CONFLICT**

Reread lines 241–253. Bill thinks the conflict has been resolved. What details let the reader know that he is wrong?

13. **depredation** (dēp'rī-dā'shən): robbery.

palatable substitute. And then, for an hour I had to try to explain to him why there was nothin' in holes, how a road can run both ways and what
260 makes the grass green. I tell you, Sam, a human can only stand so much. I takes him by the neck of his clothes and drags him down the mountain. On the way he kicks my legs black and blue from the knees down; and I've got to have two or three bites on my thumb and hand cauterized.¹⁴

"But he's gone"—continues Bill—"gone home. I showed him the road to Summit and kicked him about eight feet nearer there at one kick. I'm sorry we lose the ransom; but it was either that or Bill
270 Driscoll to the madhouse."

Bill is puffing and blowing, but there is a look of ineffable peace and growing content on his rose-pink features.

"Bill," says I, "there isn't any heart disease in your family, is there?"

"No," says Bill, "nothing chronic except malaria and accidents. Why?"

"Then you might turn around," says I, "and have a look behind you."

Bill turns and sees the boy, and loses his complexion and sits down plump
280 on the ground and begins to pluck aimlessly at grass and little sticks. For an hour I was afraid of his mind. And then I told him that my scheme was to put the whole job through immediately and that we would get the ransom and be off with it by midnight if old Dorset fell in with our **proposition**. So Bill braced up enough to give the kid a weak sort of a smile and a promise to play the Russian in a Japanese war with him as soon as he felt a little better.

I had a scheme for collecting that ransom without danger of being caught by counterplots that ought to **commend** itself to professional kidnapers. The tree under which the answer was to be left—and the money later on—was close to the road fence with big, bare fields on all sides. If a gang of constables
290 should be watching for anyone to come for the note they could see him a long way off crossing the fields or in the road. But no, sirree! At half-past eight I was up in that tree as well hidden as a tree toad, waiting for the messenger to arrive.

Exactly on time, a half-grown boy rides up the road on a bicycle, locates the pasteboard box at the foot of the fence post, slips a folded piece of paper into it and pedals away again back toward Summit.

I waited an hour and then concluded the thing was square. I slid down the tree, got the note, slipped along the fence till I struck the woods, and was back at the cave in another half an hour. I opened the note, got near the lantern,



proposition
(prŏp'ə-zīsh'ən) *n.*
a suggested plan

commend (kə-mĕnd')
v. to speak highly of; to
praise; to recommend

14. **cauterized** (kŏ'tə-rīzd'): burned a wound to stop bleeding.

300 and read it to Bill. It was written with a pen in a crabbed hand, and the sum and substance of it was this:

TWO DESPERATE MEN.

GENTLEMEN: I received your letter today by post, in regard to the ransom you ask for the return of my son. I think you are a little high in your demands, and I hereby make you a counter-proposition, which I am inclined to believe you will accept. You bring Johnny home and pay me two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, and I agree to take him off your hands. You had better come at night, for the neighbors believe he is lost, and I couldn't be responsible for what they would do to anybody they saw bringing him back.

Very respectfully,

EBENEZER DORSET. **M**

M MAKE INFERENCES

Reread the note from Ebenezer Dorset. From this passage, what can you infer about how well he knows his son?

impudent

(im'pyə-dənt) *adj.* bold and disrespectful

"Great Pirates of Penzance!" says I; "of all the **impudent**—"

But I glanced at Bill, and hesitated. He had the most appealing look in his eyes I ever saw on the face of a dumb or a talking brute.

"Sam," says he, "what's two hundred and fifty dollars, after all? We've got the money. One more night of this kid will send me to bed in Bedlam.¹⁵ Besides being a thorough gentleman, I think Mr. Dorset is a spendthrift for making us such a liberal offer. You ain't going to let the chance go, are you?"

"Tell you the truth, Bill," says I, "this little he ewe lamb has somewhat
320 got on my nerves, too. We'll take him home, pay the ransom, and make our getaway." **N**

We took him home that night. We got him to go by telling him that his father had bought a silver-mounted rifle and a pair of moccasins for him, and we were going to hunt bears the next day.

It was just twelve o'clock when we knocked at Ebenezer's front door. Just at the moment when I should have been abstracting the fifteen hundred dollars from the box under the tree, according to the original proposition, Bill was counting out two hundred and fifty dollars into Dorset's hand.

When the kid found out we were going to leave him at home he started up
330 a howl like a calliope¹⁶ and fastened himself as tight as a leech to Bill's leg. His father peeled him away gradually, like a porous plaster.

"How long can you hold him?" asks Bill.

"I'm not as strong as I used to be," says old Dorset, "but I think I can promise you ten minutes."

"Enough," says Bill. "In ten minutes I shall cross the Central, Southern, and Middle Western States, and be legging it trippingly for the Canadian border."

And, as dark as it was, and as fat as Bill was, and as good a runner as I am, he was a good mile and a half out of Summit before I could catch up with him. **N**

N CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Who wins out in the conflict between the kidnappers and the boy's father?

N CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

How is the conflict between the men and the boy finally resolved?

15. **Bedlam**: an insane asylum.

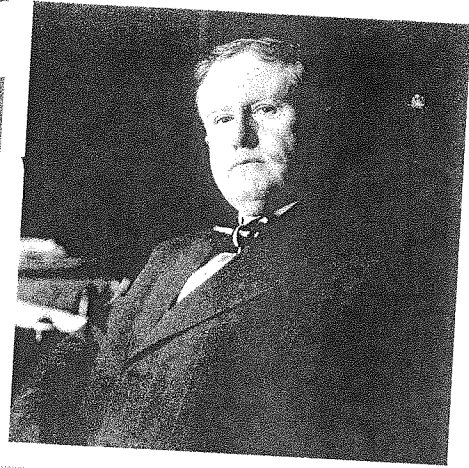
16. **calliope** (kə-lī'ə-pē'): an instrument with steam whistles.

Reading for Information

ANECDOTE O. Henry was a master of unexpected plot twists. In the following anecdote, which was originally read on the radio, you will learn about a happy coincidence that involves an undiscovered O. Henry story.

Manuscript Found in an Attic

MARCUS ROSENBAUM



O. Henry

When I told my father that I was moving to Des Moines, he told me about the only time he'd been there. It was in the 1930s, he said, when he was the business manager of the literary magazine of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. His friend Lon Tinkle was the magazine's editor. Lon also taught English at SMU, and there was a student in his class who had a severely deformed back. It was the Depression, and the young woman came from a family that was so poor she couldn't afford the operation that would correct the problem.

Her mother, who ran a boardinghouse in Galveston, was cleaning out the attic one day when she came across an old dusty manuscript. Scribbled across the top were the words, "By O. Henry." It was a nice story, and she sent it along to her daughter at SMU, who showed it to Lon. Lon had never seen the story before, but it *sounded* like O. Henry, it had an O. Henry story line, and he knew that William Sydney Porter, aka O. Henry, had lived in Houston at one time. So it was entirely possible that the famous author had gone to the beach and stayed in the Galveston boardinghouse, had written the story while he was there, and had inadvertently left the manuscript behind. Lon showed the manuscript to my father, who contacted an O. Henry expert at Columbia University in New York. The expert said he'd like to see it, so my father got on a train and took it to him.

The expert authenticated the story as O. Henry's, and my father set out to sell it. Eventually, he found himself in Des Moines, meeting with Gardner Cowles, a top editor at the *Des Moines Register*. Cowles loved the story and bought it on the spot. My father took the proceeds to the young woman in Lon Tinkle's class. It was just enough for her to have the operation she so desperately needed—and, as far as we know, to live happily ever after.

My father never told me what the O. Henry story was about. But I doubt that it could have been better than his own story: a story about O. Henry that was an O. Henry story itself.



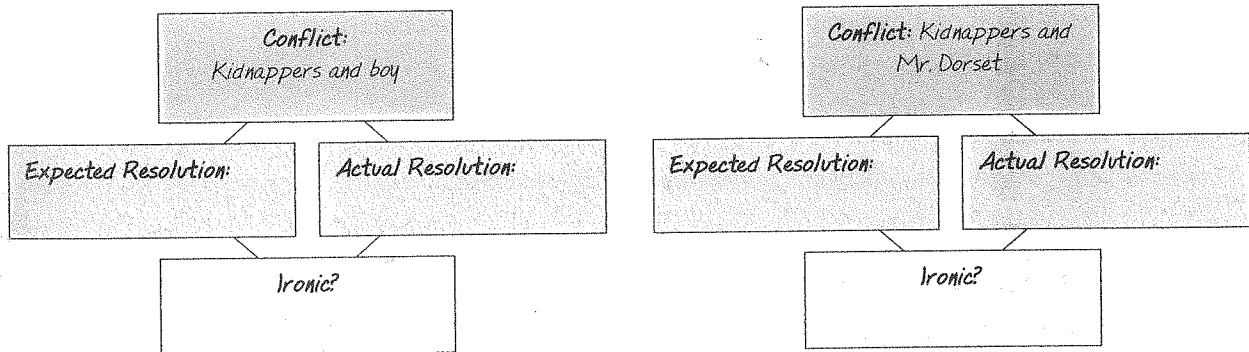
READING STANDARD
8.3.2 Evaluate the structural elements of the plot

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why do Sam and Bill need two thousand dollars?
2. **Clarify** Why does the boy prefer to stay with Sam and Bill rather than go home?
3. **Represent** Reread lines 24–26 on page 50. Use the details in this paragraph to draw a simple map showing Summit, the mountain, and the cave.

Literary Analysis

4. **Predict** Look back at the chart you created as you read. Which outcomes surprised you and which did not? Tell what **unexpected** circumstances affected Bill and Sam’s plan to get money.
5. **Analyze Conflict and Resolution** When an outcome is the opposite of what might be expected, it is said to be **ironic**. Which of the resolutions to this story’s conflicts are ironic? Show your thinking in two graphics like the ones shown.



6. **Draw Conclusions** Look back at lines 8–16. From the vocabulary Sam uses, as well as the way he presents himself and Bill to the reader at the beginning of the story, do you think the partners are typically successful in their schemes? Cite evidence to support your conclusion.

Extension and Challenge

7. **Creative Project: Music** Choose a familiar tune and rewrite the words to retell the story of “The Ransom of Red Chief.” Include details that bring out the irony in the story.
8. **Literary Criticism** O. Henry’s short stories remain popular with readers in part because they often have **surprise endings**. Read the article “Manuscript Found in an Attic” on page 58. What do you think the author means when he describes it as “a story about O. Henry that was an O. Henry story itself”?

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the vocabulary word that best completes each the sentence.

1. The kidnapers demanded a ____ before they returned the boy.
2. They had enough ____ stashed in a cave to last a week.
3. Since neither of them could complete the scheme alone, the kidnapers had to ____.
4. The worst they expected was a ____ in the local paper.
5. Red Chief was so ____, adults didn't like being around him.
6. The father did not ____ with the terms of the letter.
7. Red Chief's father had a different ____ for the kidnapers.
8. You can't ____ the parent's actions, but you can certainly understand them.

collaborate	impudent
commend	proposition
comply	provisions
diatribe	ransom

VOCABULARY IN WRITING

What is your reaction to the end of this story? Use two or more vocabulary words to write a one-paragraph answer. You could start like this.

EXAMPLE SENTENCE

I was surprised at how the kidnapers' proposition got turned around.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE PREFIX *com-*

The vocabulary word *commend* contains the prefix *com-*, which means "together" or "with." The prefix can be spelled *com-*, *col-*, *cor-*, or *con-*, depending on the letter that follows it. Learning to recognize this prefix with its various spellings can help you remember the meanings of many words.

PRACTICE Choose the word from the list that matches each numbered definition. If necessary, consult a dictionary.

collect combine concur confirm

1. to join together
2. to establish that something is true
3. to bring together in a group, gather
4. to be in agreement, or harmony



VOCABULARY PRACTICE

For more practice, go to the Vocabulary Center at ClassZone.com.