

Name:

Date:

Before Reading

malt cabana paramedic seal seaweed chain bodyboard

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Write a brief short story using all of the words in the box above. If you don't know what a word means, try to use it anyway. You have five minutes.

PREVIEW

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Name:

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"Currents" by Hannah Bottomy Voskuil
Reading Questions First Read

1. What are your first thoughts about the story? Was the reverse chronology confusing, surprising, or interesting? Explain.

PREVIEW

2. Why is it significant that this was the first hand the girl has ever held?

3. Why did one of Gary's daughter get nauseously ill?

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4. What does the word "torpid" mean as it is used in the passage?

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5. What is the effect of the final sentence of the story?

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6. What might the author's purpose be for using an unusual structure to tell the story?

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7. What is the mood of the story?

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9. What is the climax of the story?

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10. How is the title connected to the structure of the story?

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"Currents" by Hannah Bottomy Voskuil
Reading Questions Second Read

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1. When you read the story backwards, how does the mood begin? ("It was a simple summer day.")

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2. Why does the girl hold the boy's hand?

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3. What do you know about the grandmother (Gary's mom)? What is she trying to achieve?

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4. How is this story a "Coming of Age" story?

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5. Why does Gary not "protest" against the dark? What is he thinking about?

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6. What year do you think this story takes place? Explain.

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7. How would the story be different if one of the girls had died?

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8. If this story was written in first person point of view, who do you think would be the most appropriate narrator? Whose story is this to tell?

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9. How does race play a role in this story? Why do you think the author mentions race at all?

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10. What is the theme of the story?

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"Currents" by Hannah Böttomy Voskuil

After Reading Writing Task

PREVIEW

TASK: Write your own backward narrative.

DIRECTIONS: Pick from one of the writing options below.

A. Pick a memorable event from your life to share. It could be from today, it could be from last year, it could be a memory from when you were ten years old. This memory could be positive or negative. Retell the story using reverse chronology. Break up the narrative in several compact sections in order to captivate readers. Use narrative techniques that distinctly illustrate the experience. Your story should be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 500 words.

B. Write a compelling, original, fictional story in reverse chronology. Your narrative should include all of the following key aspects: point of view, setting, conflict, characters, theme, exposition, climax, and resolution. Although the story should be presented backwards, there still should be cohesion and coherence. Break up the narrative in several compact sections in order to captivate readers. Your story should be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 500 words.

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“Currents” by Hannah Bottomy Voskuil
Suggested Lesson Procedure

1. Assign students the Before Reading activity. Students will complete a word splash by writing a brief story using 7 words that are pulled from the short story “Currents.” This allows students to encounter vocabulary words and concepts before engaging with the text, and it helps them to explore the possible connections among those ideas. Speculation on what the text may say also builds anticipation for students. Give students only about five minutes to write, and it’s ok if they don’t all finish. I usually have 2 or 3 students share their stories out loud with the class and I will take time to discuss any unfamiliar terms.
2. Read the short story “Currents” as a class (this takes about 2 minutes). Make sure to take dramatic pauses after every section.
3. Have students answer the questions under “First Read”. Students can work together in groups of 1-3. Review the answers with students.
4. Read the story AGAIN, but this time read it backward, meaning read each section from the bottom up. Every time you begin a new section, **OMIT the phrase “BEFORE THAT...”**

Here is an audio version I found online where the speaker reads the story both forward and then backward (you can use it in class or just listen yourself to hear an example).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO_MrXqGI-g

5. Have students answer the questions under “Second Read”. Students can work together in groups of 1-3. Review the answers as a whole class. This important step will solidify students’ understanding of the literature as well as model important skills for literary analysis.
6. Ask students to complete the after reading writing task independently.

Note to teachers: I am unable to offer a full text version of the story because of Copyright. If you enter “Full Text Currents by Hannah Bottomy Voskuil” into any search engine, you will find a copy of the story available for you to print and use in class. Here is the link I used: [Currents](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at
chompingatthelit@gmail.com

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Before Reading

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ANSWERS WILL VARY

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"Currents" by Hannah Bottomy Voskuil
Reading Questions First Read

1. What are your first thoughts about the story? Was the reverse chronology confusing, surprising, or interesting? Explain.

Answers will vary.

2. Why is it significant that this was the first hand the girl has ever held?

It reveals how young the characters are. The author explicitly states they are 12 years old, but this added detail illustrates how innocent and honest the children are. It makes readers consider why people typically hold hands (to show love or affection) and how in this situation, the circumstances are much different.

3. Why did one of Gary's daughter get nauseously ill?

One of Gary's daughters gets ill because she sees a dead body be carried off on a stretcher, and one his arms lifelessly bounces around as no one fixes it. It could have been the physical scene that made her nauseous or maybe she knew the boy who died.

4. What does the word "torpid" mean as it is used in the passage?

Torpid means apathetic, slow, or dopey.

5. What is the effect of the final sentence of the story?

"Before that, it was a simple summer day." The final sentence exhibits the theme of the story which is that death can happen at any time and may arise even during the most pleasant of human experiences. It was just a simple day and people were enjoying themselves at the beach when tragedy strikes. This line also might allude to the theme that there are no such days as "simple" days; each day is inherently complicated, and the thought that any day could be "simple" speaks to the naïveté of the young characters. The sentence itself is ironic because the day was anything but simple, but maybe all of the seemingly simple events add up to something much more complex.

6. What might the author's purpose be for using an unusual structure to tell the story?

The author uses an anaphora which is repeated nine times ("before that"). This pulls the reader further and further into a plot whose climax comes in the middle of the story.

7. What is the mood of the story?

Dark, suspenseful, urgent, tragic

8. What is the tone of the story?

Objective, matter-of-fact, and non-partisan

9. What is the climax of the story?

The climax of the story is the discovery of a boy's body.

10. How is the title connected to the structure of the story?

A current is a volume of water moving from one location to another. A rip tide is a type of current caused by tidal flow in confined areas and are dangerous to swimmers and boaters. A rip tide pulls material back into the ocean revealing other layers of matter underneath—this is similar to the structure of the story. Slowly, the author reveals pieces of information to eventually expose the plot in order for the story to make sense.

“Currents” by Hannah Bottomy Voskuil
Reading Questions Second Read

1. When you read the story backwards, how does the mood begin? (“It was a simple summer day.”)

If you read the last section of the story first, the mood is optimistic, curious, and innocent.

2. Why does the girl hold the boy's hand?

The girl holds the boy's hand because she is comforting him. The boy's brother died and the young girl is consoling the boy who is in shock and wordless.

3. What do you know about the grandmother (Gary's mom)? What is she trying to achieve?

The grandmother turns the lights off for the porch without noticing Gary was sitting outside because she was “distracted.” She wants to quickly reverse the negative thoughts about the ocean in her grandkids' minds by forcing them to go swimming the next day. Some might say the grandmother is unsympathetic or insensitive for telling her kids they must quickly move on from the tragedy. She may have “thick skin” because she's older and has seen tragedy before. She is worried about how this event will affect her family and perhaps is in denial about how the event has already impacted her grandkids. She might be trying to keep the grandkids young at heart.

4. How is this story a “Coming of Age” story?

The two young girls and the boy's brother all lose their innocence in this story—transitioning from children to young adults. The world is not always a safe place; danger exists everywhere, even in the most seemingly friendly places. The ocean has been corrupted in their minds. It is no longer just a place for fun, joy, and serenity—it now has another dark, threatening, and menacing side.

5. Why does Gary not “protest” against the dark? What is he thinking about?

Gary is drinking on the porch in the dark leaning toward the ocean. This is because he is disturbed and pained about the events that transpired. Firstly, a death of a child is unsettling—even if the child is a stranger. Secondly, Gary's young girls were swimming at the beach that day at the same time, so it could have easily been one of his own kids that were caught in the current. Lastly, the text states that Gary mistook the boy's hair for seaweed which readers can infer Gary now feels guilt for not saving the boy's life.

6. What year do you think this story takes place? Explain.

Answers will vary. This story must have taken place sometime after the 1970s because jet skis are mentioned and jet skis were not invented until 1973.

7. How would the story be different if one of the girls had died?

Answers will vary. The grandmother would probably be devastated and not be so laissez-faire about everything. She probably would not be eager to get her living grandkids to go back into the water the next day.

8. If this story was written in first person point of view, who do you think would be the most appropriate narrator? Whose story is this to tell?

Answers will vary. Some might say that it's the boy's brother's story to tell because he is the closest to the boy and he is affected the most by the tragic event. Some may say that the most appropriate narrator would have to be an adult because children are typically unreliable narrators and an adult that was not impacted directly by this situation might have a more objective view.

9. How does race play a role in this story? Why do you think the author mentions race at all?

The child who dies is a Filipino boy. The author mentions that the boy's brother (who is assumed Filipino as well) pleads desperately with the lifeguard to help his brother. Perhaps the minimal dialogue suggests the boy's limited ability to communicate due to a language barrier. Or perhaps the author is trying to make a statement that there was less of a commotion and hurry to save the boy (20 minutes he had been missing) because the boy was Filipino as opposed to white.

10. What is the theme of the story?

The human response to death is different for everyone. The death of a young person is particularly hard for a community to cope with.

Death can happen anywhere and anytime. Death and danger are always present even during the most pleasant of human experiences.

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