

Lesson 3

A Mother in Mannville



About the author

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was born on August 8, 1896, in Washington, D.C. A writer from an early age, she won a prize of \$2 for a short story published in the Washington Post in 1907. She attended the University of Wisconsin where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English. She married Charles Rawlings, also a writer. The couple moved to New York, where they worked as journalists for various newspapers.

In 1933, the couple divorced. In 1941, she married Norton Baskin, a hotel owner from St. Augustine, Florida, and lived with him until her death in 1953. Rawlings was considered a writer of local or regional literature which focuses on a particular geographical setting of rural, Southern USA. Although her stories are based on the seemingly simple lives of rural people, her themes are universal.

Rawlings continued to write until her death from a cerebral hemorrhage on December 14, 1953.

Warm up: Discuss in pairs.

A. What is an orphanage? What kinds of feeling do orphans have to deal with?

B. Pre reading tasks

1. Point of view: A story can be told from *a first person point of view or a third person point of view.*

When a story is told from the first person point of view, the narrator uses words such as 'I' and 'we' and is a witness to, or part of, the action. When a story is told from a third person point of view, the narrator is not involved in the action and uses 'he', 'she', 'they' instead of 'I' and 'we'.

As you read ‘A Mother in Mannville’, decide which point of view is used by the narrator.

2. Setting: The setting of a story or novel is the place and time in which the actions take place. Authors often use descriptions of time, season, weather, landscape, the natural surroundings etc. to establish the setting of a literary work.

As you read the story, note down as many descriptions as possible used by the author to create the setting.

You may use the following table to organise these descriptions.

Description of time, weather etc.	Description of location, area, nature etc.
Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I went there in autumn... 	Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The orphanage is high in the Carolina mountains.

C. Now read an abridged version of the story ‘A Mother in Mannville’ and then do the activities that follow.

A Mother in Mannville

The orphanage is high in the Carolina mountains. I was there in the autumn. I wanted quiet, isolation, to do some troublesome writing. I wanted mountain air to blow out the malaria from too long a time in the subtropics. I was homesick too, for the flaming of maples in October, and for corn shocks and pumpkins and black-walnut trees.... I found them all living in a cabin that belonged to the orphanage, half a mile beyond the orphanage farm. When I took the cabin, I asked for a boy or man to come and chop wood for the fireplace....

I looked up from my typewriter one late afternoon, a little startled. A boy stood at the door and my pointer dog, my companion, was at his side and had not barked to warn me. The boy was probably twelve years old, but undersized. He wore overalls and a torn shirt, and was barefooted.

He said, “I can chop some wood today.”

.....“You? But you’re small.”

“Size don’t matter, chopping wood,” he said. “Some of the big boys don’t chop good. I’ve been chopping wood at the orphanage a long time.”



“Very well. There’s the ax. Go ahead and see what you can do.”

I went back to work, closing the door....

He began to chop. The blows were rhythmic and steady, and shortly I had forgotten him, the sound no more of an interruption than a consistent rain. I suppose an hour and a half passed and I heard the boy’s steps on the cabin stoop.... The boy said, “I have to go to supper now,” he said. “I can come again tomorrow.”

I said, “I’ll pay you now for what you’ve done,” thinking I should probably have to insist on an older boy....

We went together back of the cabin. An astonishing amount of solid wood had been cut.... “But you’ve done as much as a man,” I said. “This is a splendid pile.”

I looked at him, actually, for the first time. His hair was the color of the corn shocks and his eyes, very direct, were like the mountain sky when rain is pending – gray, with a shadowing of that miraculous blue.... I gave him a quarter.

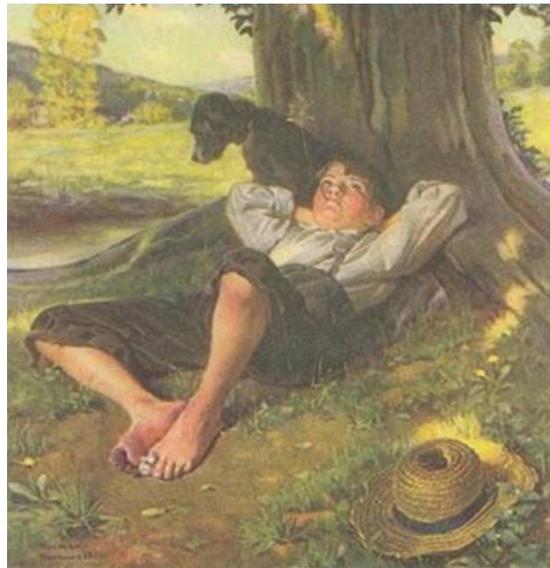
“You may come tomorrow afternoon,” I said, “and thank you very much.”

He looked at me, and at the coin, and seemed to want to speak, but could not, and turned away....

At daylight I was half wakened by the sound of chopping. Again it was so even in texture that I went back to sleep. When I left my bed in the cool morning, the boy had come and gone, and a stack of kindling was neat against the cabin wall. He came after school in the afternoon and worked until time to return to the orphanage. His name was Jerry.... he had been at the orphanage since he was four. I could picture him at four, with the same grave gray-blue eyes and the same – independence? No, the word that comes to me is “integrity”.... It is bedded on courage, but it is more than brave. It is honest, but it is more than honesty. The ax handle broke one day. Jerry said the woodshop at the orphanage would repair it. I brought money to pay for the job and he refused it.

“I’ll pay for it,” he said. “I broke it. I brought the ax down careless.”

“But no one hits accurately every time,” I told him. “The fault was in the wood of the handle. I’ll see the man from whom I bought it ”



It was only then that he would take the money. He was standing back of his own carelessness. He was a free-will agent and he chose to do careful work, and if he failed, he took the responsibility without subterfuge.

And he did for me the unnecessary thing, the gracious thing, that we find done only by the great of heart. Things no training can teach, for they are done on the instant, with no predicated experience. He found a cubbyhole beside the fireplace that I had not noticed. There, of his own accord, he put kindling and "medium" wood, so that I might always have dry fire material ready in case of sudden wet weather. A stone was loose in the rough walk to the cabin. He dug a deeper hole and steadied it, although he came, himself, by a shortcut over the bank. I found that when I tried to return his thoughtfulness with such things as candy and apples, he was wordless. "Thank you" was, perhaps, an expression for which he had had no use, for his courtesy was instinctive. He only looked at the gift and at me, and a curtain lifted, so that I saw deep into the clear well of his eyes, and gratitude was there, and affection, soft over the firm granite of his character....

He became intimate, of course, with my pointer, Pat. There is a strange communion between a boy and a dog. Perhaps they possess the same singleness of spirit, the same kind of wisdom. It is difficult to explain, but it exists. When I went across the state for a weekend, I left the dog in Jerry's charge.... My return was belated and fog filled the mountain passes so treacherously that.... it was Monday noon before I reached the cabin. The dog had been fed and cared for that morning. Jerry came early in the afternoon, anxious.

"The superintendent said nobody would drive in the fog," he said. "I came.... last night and you hadn't come. So I brought Pat some of my breakfast this morning. I wouldn't have let anything happen to him."

.... I gave him a dollar in payment, and he looked at it and went away. But that night he came in the darkness and knocked at the door.

"Come in, Jerry," I said, "if you're allowed to be away this late."

"I told maybe a story" he said, "I told them I thought you would want to see me."

"That's true," I assured him, and I saw his relief. "I want to hear about how you managed with the dog."

He sat by the fire with me.... and told me of their two days together. The dog lay close to him and found a comfort there that I did not have for him.... “He stayed right with me,” he told me, “except when he ran in the laurel.... There was a place where the grass was high and I lay down in it and hid. I could hear Pat hunting for me.... When he found me he acted crazy, and he ran around and around me, in circles.”

We watched the flames.

“That’s an apple log,” he said. “It burns the prettiest of any wood.”
We were very close.

He was suddenly impelled to speak.

“You look a little bit like my mother,” he said. “Especially in the dark, by the fire.”

“But you were only four, Jerry, when you came here. You have remembered how she looked, all these years?”

“My mother lives in Mannville,” he said.

For a moment, finding that he had a mother shocked me... I did not know why it disturbed me. Then I understood my distress. I was filled with a passionate resentment that any woman should go away and leave her son. ... A son like this one – The orphanage was a wholesome place, the food was more than adequate, the boys were healthy... . Granted, perhaps, that the boy felt no lack, what blood fed the bowels of a woman who did not yearn over this child’s lean body that had come in parturition out of her own? ...

“Have you seen her, Jerry – lately?” I asked.

“I see her every summer. She sends for me.”

I wanted to cry out. “Why are you not with her? How can she let you go away again?”

He said, “She comes up here from Mannville whenever she can. She doesn’t have a job now.”

His face shone in the firelight.

“She wanted to give me a puppy, but they can’t let any one boy keep a puppy. You remember the suit I had on last Sunday?” He was plainly proud. “She sent me that for Christmas. The Christmas before that” – he drew a long breath, savoring the memory – “she sent me a pair of skates.... I let the other boys use them, but they’re careful of them.”

What circumstance other than poverty—?



“I’m going to take the dollar you gave me for taking care of Pat,” he said, “and buy her a pair of gloves.”

... I hated her. Poverty or not, there was other food than bread, and the soul could starve as quickly as the body. He was taking his dollar to buy gloves for her big, stupid hands and she lived away from him, in Mannville, and contented herself with sending him skates.

“She likes white gloves,” he said. “Do you think I can get them for a dollar?”
“I think so,” I said...

And after my first fury at her – we did not speak of her again, his having a mother, any sort at all, relieved me of the ache I had had about him... He was not lonely. It was none of my concern.

He came every day and cut my wood and did small helpful favors and stayed to talk. The days had become cold, and often I let him come inside the cabin. He would lie on the floor in front of the fire, with one arm across the pointer, and they would both doze and wait quietly for me. Other days they ran with a common ecstasy through the laurel, and he brought me back vermilion maple leaves, and chestnut boughs dripping with imperial yellow. I was ready to go.

I said to him, “You have been my friend, Jerry. I shall often think of you and miss you. Pat will miss you too. I am leaving tomorrow.”

He did not answer... and I watched him go in silence up the hill.

I expected him the next day, but he did not come... I closed the cabin and started the car... I stopped by the orphanage and left the cabin key and money... with Miss Clark. “And will you call Jerry for me to say good-bye to him?”

“I don’t know where he is,” she said. “I’m afraid he’s not well. He didn’t eat his dinner this noon. One of the other boys saw him going over the hill into the laurel... It’s not like him”...

I was almost relieved ... it would be easier not to say good-bye to him. ...

I said, “I wanted to talk with you about his mother – why he’s here – but I’m in more of a hurry than I expected to be. It’s out of the question for me to see her now, too. But here’s some money... to buy things for him at Christmas and on his birthday. It will be better than for me to try to send him things. I could so easily duplicate – skates, for instance.” She blinked her honest spinster’s eyes. “There’s not much use for skates here,” she said. Her stupidity annoyed me.



“What I mean,” I said, “is that I don’t want to duplicate the things his mother sends him. I might have chosen skates if I didn’t know she had already given them to him.”

She stared at me.

“I don’t understand,” she said. “He has no mother. He has no skates.”

D. Choose the meaning of each word that is closest to the meaning in the context of the story.

1. accurately
a. inexactly b. precisely c. independently
2. duplicate
a. repeat b. fool c. lie
3. ecstasy
a. happiness b. desire c. disagreement
4. impelled
a. rejected b. turned c. forced
5. integrity
a. wholeness b. trustworthiness c. interest
6. intimate
a. secretive b. quiet c. friendly
7. isolation
a. privacy b. companionship c. dislike
8. puppy
a. tie b. dog c. lamb
9. stack
a. pile b. log c. stick
10. treacherously
a. repetitiously b. unhappily c. faithlessly

E. True-false: Some of the statements below are true and some are false. In pairs, choose the false statements and discuss why they are false.

1. The author was homesick for the subtropics.
2. The author expected to find a large pile of wood after the boy's first day of work.
3. Jerry could chop wood as well as a man.
4. Jerry paid to have the axe repaired.
5. Jerry did other jobs around the cabin without being asked.
6. The author's dog was fed and cared for while she was away.
7. The dog had tried to run away from Jerry in the high grass.
8. The author sympathizes with Jerry's mother.
9. Jerry did not stop by the cabin to say good-bye to the author.
10. Miss Clark told the author that Jerry had no mother.

F. Fill in each of the blanks (a-e) with a word from the box that best completes a sentence.

confidence	predicated	missed	subterfuge	betrayed
------------	------------	--------	------------	----------

At first the relationship between the author-narrator and Jerry is (a) _____ on Jerry chopping wood well. But soon a real bond develops between them because Jerry has (b) _____ his mother's love in his life and needs the affection and support of a mother figure. The narrator has (c) _____ in Jerry's character when she sees his integrity. Jerry's only (d) _____ is to say he has a mother. The narrator feels (e) _____ when Jerry tells her he has a mother.

G. In the table below there are some questions in column A with their answers in column B but not in the correct order. Match the questions and answers.

A	B
1. Why does the writer's pointer dog not bark at Jerry?	a. He seems too small.
2. Why does the narrator think Jerry will not be able to chop the wood effectively?	b. He senses that Jerry is a friend.
3. Why is the narrator shocked when Jerry says he has a mother in Mannville?	c. She feels the mother should not have deserted such an adorable boy.
4. Why does the narrator think Jerry has integrity?	d. Jerry is committed to the tasks he does and is honest and trustworthy.
5. Why does Jerry disappear from the orphanage at the end of the story?	e. Jerry did not want to say good bye to the author.

H. From your reading of the story, complete the following sentences. (Use only one word in each blank).

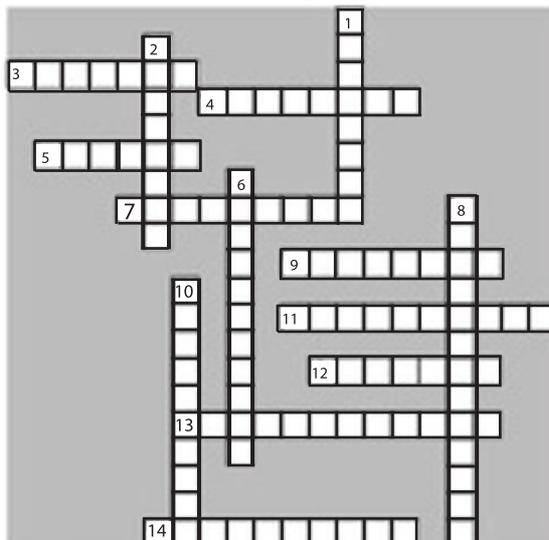
- The narrator wanted to be alone to do her writing. Another way to say alone is
- Jerry came every day to chop wood. He was very
- The narrator likes Jerry and what he stands for. She says he has because he always does the right thing even before he is asked.
- When the narrator left for the weekend, she left plenty of food for the dog. In other words, she left food for the dog.
- The narrator was unable to return on time to the cabin after her weekend trip because the roads were snowy and icy. They were

I. Answer the following questions

- Describe Jerry's physical appearance. Try to include the descriptions that the narrator used.
- In what ways does Jerry show integrity?
- What does the narrator mean when she says that Jerry "was a free-will agent"? How does the narrator feel toward Jerry?
- Why do you think that Jerry made up the stories about his mother and his skates?

J. Write about a relationship you have had with an adult who was not a family member. What memories do you have about him/her?

K. Cross word puzzle



Across

- 3 disease transmitted by mosquitoes
- 4 driven
- 5 a little
- 7 abnormal
- 9 spread throughout
- 11 absent minded
- 12 mutilated, crippled
- 13 shrub with pink, white or purple flowers
- 14 bright red

Down

- 1 poisonous plant with small white flowers
- 2 small pieces of dry wood used to start a fire
- 6 childbirth
- 8 dangerously
- 10 plan to hide the truth

L. Look at the storyboard below. A storyboard is a visual form of telling a story. One may draw a series of pictures to narrate a story.



[Source: https://sbt.blob.core.windows.net/storyboards/kenzy_ahmed/a-mother-in-mannville-2.png]

Choose a series of actions from the story ‘A Mother in Mannville’ and draw your own storyboard. Display them in your classroom with the help of the teacher.