

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## SEL CHARACTER TRAITS – Positive or Negative Traits?

**Directions:** Here is a list of descriptive words to help you identify a character's traits in the stories you read. As you learn new vocabulary words, you may add those words with similar meanings to these lists.

### POSITIVE TRAITS

unselfish  
brave, courageous  
daring, bold  
adventurous  
kindhearted  
generous,  
considerate, caring  
active  
industrious  
determined, resolute  
persevering, persistent  
loyal  
respectful  
honest  
passive  
unique  
tough, hardened  
strong-minded  
comical  
skillful  
cheerful  
optimistic  
talented, gifted  
insightful, perceptive  
clever, ingenious  
wise  
creative, inventive  
patient  
tolerant

### NEGATIVE TRAITS

selfish, egotistical  
cowardly, weak  
meek, shy  
fearful  
coldhearted  
cheap, miserly  
uncaring, indifferent  
inactive  
lazy  
indecisive, wavering  
feeble  
disloyal  
disrespectful  
deceptive, dishonest  
aggressive  
ordinary  
vulnerable  
weak-minded  
dramatic  
awkward, clumsy  
depressed  
pessimistic  
untalented  
oblivious  
ignorant  
unwise  
unimaginative  
impatient  
intolerant

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### **SEL Character Traits: Positive or Negative Words?**

**Directions:** Here is a list of descriptive words to help you identify a character's traits in the stories you read. As you learn new vocabulary words, you may add those words with similar meanings to these lists.

#### **Positive Character Traits**

**Adventurous**...bold...daring

**Brave**...courageous...heroic...valiant

**Caring**...considerate...kindhearted

**Cheerful**...happy...jolly

**Clever**...brainy...gifted...insightful...intelligent...talented...wise

**Creative**...artistic...imaginative...ingenious...inventive

**Determined**...firm...unwavering...resolute

**Gentle**...calm...mild mannered...tender

**Funny**...amusing...comical...humorous...witty

**Honest**...candid...direct...open...truthful

**Industrious**...busy...hard-working...productive

**Loving**...adoring...doting...affectionate

**Loyal**...dependable...devoted...trustworthy

**Optimistic**...confident...hopeful...positive

**Patient**...tolerant...uncomplaining

**Persevering**...firm...persistent

**Persuasive**...credible...influencing

**Quiet**...calm...peaceful

**Respectful**...reverent

**Skillful**...competent...expert

**Strong-minded**...decisive...resolute

**Unselfish**...generous...noble

**Youthful**...childlike

**Zealous**...eager...enthusiastic...keen...passionate

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### **Negative Character Traits**

**Aggressive**...destructive...hostile...violent

**Boring**...dull...unexciting

**Cowardly**...weak...

**Fearful**...afraid...scared...terrified...vulnerable

**Ignorant**...unaware...uninformed

**Impatient**...annoyed...intolerant...irritated

**Indecisive**...wavering...can't make up your mind

**Lazy**...indolent...idle

**Obnoxious**...disrespectful...rude...

**Ordinary**...plain...regular

**Shy**...bashful...meek...timid...withdrawn

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

**SEL Theme: Attitude**

**Read to find out:**

- 1. Read to find out about a problem Mr. Edison faced.**
- 2. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.**
- 3. Answer the questions at the end of the story.**

### **“A Chance to Start Over”**

It was a cold December night in West Orange, New Jersey. Thomas Edison's factory was humming with activity. Work was **proceeding** (\_\_\_\_\_) on a variety of fronts as the great inventor was trying to turn more of his dreams into practical realities. Edison's plant, made of concrete and steel, was deemed "fireproof". As you may have already guessed, it wasn't!

On that **frigid** (\_\_\_\_\_) night in 1914, the sky was lit up by a sensational **blaze** (\_\_\_\_\_) that had burst through the plant roof. Edison's 24-year-old son, Charles, made a **frenzied** (\_\_\_\_\_) search for his famous inventor-father. When he finally found him, he was watching the fire. His white hair was blowing in the wind. His face was **illuminated** (\_\_\_\_\_) by the leaping flames. "My heart ached for him," said Charles. "Here he was, 67 years old, and everything he had worked for was going up in flames. When he saw me, he shouted, 'Charles! Where's your mother?' When I told him I didn't know, he said, 'Find her! Bring her here! She'll never see anything like this as long as she lives.'"

Next morning, Mr. Edison looked at the **ruins** (\_\_\_\_\_) of his factory and said

this of his loss: "There's value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God, we can start anew."

### **SEL/Comprehension Questions**

- 1. What was the problem Mr. Edison faced in the story?**
- 2. Having read about Mr. Edison's reaction to his problem, what can you infer about him as a man? (Identify a character trait you would use to describe him and include that character trait in your answer.)**
- 3. Complete the following sentence, and then explain why you chose the word you did:**

*Whether or not you let awful things in your life destroy you, depends largely on your \_\_\_\_\_.*

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

SEL Themes: **Courage, Attitude**

Read to find out:

1. What was the problem the poor donkey faced?
2. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.
3. Answer the questions at the end of the story.

### “Donkey in the Well”

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried **piteously** (\_\_\_\_\_) for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally he decided the animal was old, that the well needed to be covered anyway and that it just wasn't worth **retrieving** (\_\_\_\_\_) the donkey. So he invited all his neighbors to come over and help him.

They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Moral: Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up.

### SEL/Comprehension Questions

1. What were the reasons the farmer did not try to get the donkey out of the well?
2. Would you say the farmer was trying to take the easy way out? Explain.
3. Write about a time in your life when you felt like the donkey. How did you manage to get out of your well?

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

### SEL Themes: Courage, Friendship

1. What are the qualities you look for in a best friend?
2. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.
3. Answer the questions at the end of the story.

#### “Listen to your Heart”

Horror gripped the heart of a World War I soldier, as he saw his lifelong friend fall in battle. Caught in a **trench** (\_\_\_\_\_) with continuous gunfire whizzing over his head, the soldier asked his Lieutenant if he could go out into the "no man's land" between the trenches to bring his fallen **comrade** (\_\_\_\_\_) back.

"You can go," said the Lieutenant, "but I don't think it will be worth it. Your friend is probably dead and you may throw your life away." The Lieutenant's words didn't matter, and the soldier went anyway.

Miraculously, he managed to reach his friend, **hoisted** (\_\_\_\_\_) him onto his shoulder and brought him back to their company's trench. As the two of them tumbled in together to the bottom of the trench, the officer checked the wounded soldier, and then looked kindly at his friend. "I told you it wouldn't be worth it," he said. "Your friend is dead and you are **mortally** (\_\_\_\_\_) wounded."

"It was worth it, Sir," said the soldier.

"What do you mean by worth it?" responded the Lieutenant. "Your friend is dead."

"Yes Sir," the private answered, "but it was worth it because when I got to him, he was still alive and I got the chance to hear him say....."JIM..... I KNEW YOU'D COME."

Many times in life, whether a thing is worth doing or not, really depends on how you look at it. Take up all your courage and do something your heart tells you to do, so that you may not regret not doing it later in your life....

### SEL/Comprehension Questions

1. Explain how this quote reflects what happened in the story.

*"A true friend is one who walks in, when the rest of the world walks out."*

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

SEL Themes: Compassion, Community

1. What does *bartering* mean?
2. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.
3. Answer the questions at the end when you finish reading.

### “Green Peas and Red Marbles”

During the **waning** (\_\_\_\_\_) years of the **depression** (\_\_\_\_\_) in a small Idaho community, I used to stop by Mr. Miller's roadside stand for farm fresh **produce** (\_\_\_\_\_) as the season made it available. Food and money were still extremely **scarce**, (\_\_\_\_\_) and **bartering** (\_\_\_\_\_) was used **extensively** (\_\_\_\_\_).

One day Mr. Miller was bagging some early potatoes for me. I noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, **ragged** (\_\_\_\_\_) but clean, hungrily **appraising** (\_\_\_\_\_) a basket of freshly picked green peas.

I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. I am a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. **Pondering** (\_\_\_\_\_) the peas, I could not help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller and the ragged boy next to me.

"Hello Barry, how are you today? "

"H'lo, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank ya. Jus' admiring' those peas...sure look good."

"They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?"

"Fine. Gittin' stronger alla' time."

"Good. Anything I can help you with?"

"No, Sir, Jus' admiring' them peas."

"Would you like to take some home?"

"No, Sir. Got nothing' to pay for 'em with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?"

"All I got's my prize marble here."

"Is that right? Let me see it."

"Here 'tis. She's a dandy."

"I can see that. Hm m m m m m m m, only thing is this one is blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?"

"Not zackley.....but almost."

"Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble."

"Sure will. Thanks Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said, "There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor **circumstances** (\_\_\_\_\_). Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes, or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he does not like red after all and he sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, perhaps."

I left the stand smiling to myself, impressed with this man. A short time later I moved to Colorado but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys, and their **bartering** (\_\_\_\_\_).

Several years went by, each more **rapid** (\_\_\_\_\_) than the previous one. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community and while I was there learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his viewing that evening and knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to **accompany** (\_\_\_\_\_) them. Upon arrival at the **mortuary** (\_\_\_\_\_) we fell into line to meet the relatives of the **deceased** (\_\_\_\_\_) and to offer whatever words of comfort we could.

Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts. All were very professional looking.

They approached Mrs. Miller, standing composed and smiling by her husband's **casket** (\_\_\_\_\_). Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket.

Her misty light blue eyes followed them as one by one each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly, wiping his eyes.

Our turn came to meet Mrs. Miller. I told her who I was and mentioned the story she had told me about the marbles. With her eyes glistening, she took my hand and led me to the casket.

"Those three young men who just left were the boys I told you about. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim 'traded' them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size, they came to pay their **debt** (\_\_\_\_\_)."

"We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world" she confided, "but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho."

With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three **exquisitely** (\_\_\_\_\_) shined red marbles.

### **SEL/Comprehension Questions**

- 1. Jim wasn't truly bartering with the young boys, so what was he doing? Why do you think he made them think he was bartering with them?**
- 2. What did the young men finally do with their red marbles at Jim's funeral?**
- 3. Why is this significant?**

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

### SEL Theme: Attitude and Values

1. Read to find out about a fisherman and banker and answer the questions at the end of the story.
2. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.
3. Answer the questions at the end of the story.

### “The Banker and the Fisherman”

The American investment banker was at the pier of a small **coastal** (\_\_\_\_\_) Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked.

Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The American **complimented** (\_\_\_\_\_) the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.

The Mexican replied, "Only a little while."

The American then asked, "Why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish?"

The Mexican said, "With this I have more than enough to support my family's needs."

The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos, I have a full and busy life."

The American **scoffed** (\_\_\_\_\_), "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing; and with the **proceeds** (\_\_\_\_\_), buy a bigger boat: With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats. Eventually you would have a **fleet** (\_\_\_\_\_) of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor; eventually opening your own **cannery** (\_\_\_\_\_). You would control the product, processing and **distribution** (\_\_\_\_\_). You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then Los Angeles and eventually New York where you will run your ever-expanding **enterprise** (\_\_\_\_\_)."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But, how long will this all take?"

To which the American replied, "15 to 20 years."

"But what then?" asked the Mexican.

The American laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions."

"Millions?...Then what?"

The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos."

### **SEL/Comprehension Questions**

**1. What did the banker want the fisherman to do?**

**2. Explain why it is ironic.**

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

### SEL Themes: Friendship, Community

1. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.
2. Answer the questions at the end when you finish reading.

### “The Colors of Friendship”

Once upon a time the colors of the world started to **quarrel** (\_\_\_\_\_). All claimed that they were the best, the most important, the most useful, the most beautiful, and the favorite.

Green said:

"Clearly I am the most important. I am the sign of life and of hope. I was chosen for grass, trees and leaves. Without me, all animals would die. Look over the countryside and you will see that I am in the **majority** (\_\_\_\_\_)." ."

Blue interrupted:

"You only think about the earth, but consider the sky and the sea. It is the water that is the basis of life and drawn up by the clouds from the deep sea. The sky gives space and peace and serenity. Without my peace, you would all be nothing."

Yellow chuckled:

"You are all so serious. I bring laughter, gaiety, and warmth into the world. The sun is yellow, the moon is yellow, and stars are yellow. Every time you look at a sunflower, the whole world starts to smile. Without me there would be no fun."

Orange started next to blow her trumpet:

"I am the color of health and strength. I may be **scarce** (\_\_\_\_\_), but I am precious for I serve the needs of human life. I carry the most important vitamins. Think of carrots, pumpkins, oranges, mangoes, and papayas. I don't hang around all the time, but when I fill the sky at sunrise or sunset, my beauty is so striking that no one gives another thought to any of you."

Red could stand it no longer he shouted out:

"I am the ruler of all of you. I am blood - life's blood! I am the color of danger and of bravery. I am willing to fight for a cause. I bring fire into the blood. Without me, the earth would be as empty as the moon. I am the color of passion and of love, the red rose, the poinsettia and the poppy."

Purple rose up to his full height:

He was very tall and spoke with great pomp: "I am the color of royalty and power. Kings, chiefs, and bishops have always chosen me for I am the sign of authority and wisdom. People do not question me! They listen and obey."

Finally Indigo spoke, much more quietly than all the others, but with just as much determination: "Think of me. I am the color of silence. You hardly notice me, but without me you all become **superficial** (\_\_\_\_\_). I represent thought and reflection, twilight and deep water. You need me for balance and contrast, for prayer and inner peace."

And so the colors went on **boasting** (\_\_\_\_\_), each convinced of his or her own superiority. Their quarreling became louder and louder. Suddenly there was a startling flash of bright lightening, thunder rolled and boomed. Rain started to pour down **relentlessly** (\_\_\_\_\_). The colors **crouched** (\_\_\_\_\_) down in fear, drawing close to one another for comfort.

In the midst of the **clamor** (\_\_\_\_\_), rain began to speak:

"You foolish colors, fighting amongst yourselves, each trying to **dominate** (\_\_\_\_\_) the rest. Don't you know that you were each made for a special purpose? You are all

**unique** ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) and different? Join hands with one another and come to me."

Doing as they were told, the colors united and joined hands.

The rain continued:

"From now on, when it rains, each of you will stretch across the sky in a great bow of color as a reminder that you can all live in peace. The Rainbow is a sign of hope for tomorrow."

And so, whenever a good rain washes the world and a Rainbow appears in the sky, let us remember to appreciate one another.

### **SEL/Comprehension Questions**

**1. What was the conflict between all the colors?**

**2. How did rain resolve the conflict between the colors?**

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

### SEL Themes: Attitude and Values, High Expectations

1. Do you have a special talent? Read to find out about Itzhak Perlman's talent.
2. Fill in the blanks with synonyms for the bold words to show you understand their meanings.
3. Answer the questions at the end when you finish reading.

#### **“Playing A Violin With Three Strings,”** By *Jack Riemer*

On Nov. 18, 1995, Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, came on stage to give a concert at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City.

If you have ever been to a Perlman concert, you know that getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He was stricken with **polio** (\_\_\_\_\_) as a child, and so he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of two crutches. To see him walk across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is an awesome sight.

He walks painfully, yet majestically, until he reaches his chair. Then he sits down, slowly, puts his crutches on the floor, undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor and **proceeds** (\_\_\_\_\_) to play.

By now, the audience is used to this **ritual** (\_\_\_\_\_). They sit quietly while he makes his way across the stage to his chair. They remain **reverently** (\_\_\_\_\_) silent while he undoes the clasps on his legs. They wait until he is ready to play.

But this time, something went wrong. Just as he finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap - it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant. There was no mistaking what he had to do.

We figured that he would have to get up, put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches and limp his way off stage - to either find another violin or else find another string for this one. But he didn't. Instead, he waited a moment, closed his eyes and then signaled the conductor to begin again.

The orchestra began, and he played from where he had left off. And he played with such passion and such power and such purity as they had never heard before.

Of course, anyone knows that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. I know that, and you know that, but that night Itzhak Perlman refused to know that.

You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was detuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before.

When he finished, there was an awesome silence in the room. And then people rose and cheered. There was an extraordinary outburst of applause from every corner of the auditorium. We were all on our feet, screaming and cheering, doing everything we could to show how much we appreciated what he had done.

He smiled, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet us, and then he said - not boastfully, but in a quiet, pensive, reverent tone - "You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."

What a powerful line that is. It has stayed in my mind ever since I heard it. And who knows? Perhaps that is the definition of life - not just for artists but for all of us.

Here is a man who has prepared all his life to make music on a violin of four strings, who, all of a sudden, in the middle of a concert, finds himself with only three strings; so he makes music with three strings, and the music he made that night with just three strings was more beautiful, more **sacred** (\_\_\_\_\_), more memorable, than any that he had ever made before, when he had four strings.

So, perhaps our task in this shaky, fast-changing, **bewildering** (\_\_\_\_\_) world in which we live is to make music, at first with all that we have, and then, when that is no longer possible, to make music with what we have left.

### **SEL/Comprehension Questions**

- 1. What are some character traits you would use to describe Perlman?**
- 2. Why didn't Perlman just get up and get a new violin for himself?**
- 3. Explain what Perlman meant when he said, "...sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."**

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

SEL Themes: Attitude and Values, High Expectations

1. Answer the questions at the end when you finish reading.

### “The Mountain Story”

A son and his father were walking on the mountains.  
Suddenly, his son falls, hurts himself and screams: "AAAhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"  
To his surprise, he hears the voice repeating, somewhere in the mountain:  
"AAAhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"  
Curious, he yells: "Who are you?"  
He receives the answer: "Who are you?"  
Angered at the response, he screams: "Idiot!"  
He receives the answer: "Idiot!"  
He looks to his father and asks: "What's going on?"  
The father smiles and says: "My son, pay attention."  
And then he screams to the mountain: "I admire you!"  
The voice answers: "I admire you!"  
Again the man screams: "You are a champion!"  
The voice answers: "You are a champion!"  
The boy is surprised, but does not understand.  
Then the father explains: "People call this ECHO, but really this is LIFE. It gives you back everything you say or do. Our life is simply a reflection of our actions. If you want more love in the world, create more love in your heart. If you want more competence in your team, improve your competence. This relationship applies to everything, in all aspects of life; Life will give you back everything you have given to it."

### SEL/Comprehension Questions

1. What was the son's initial reaction when he first heard the echo?
2. What valuable lesson did the father teach his son?
3. Explain how the theme “*Your life is not a coincidence, it's a reflection of you,*” reflects the son's lesson in this story?

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## SEL Stories & Comprehension Questions

### SEL Themes: Friendship

#### 1. Read this excerpt from Star Girl, by Jerry Spinelli, and complete the Character Matrix that follows.

When I was little, my uncle Pete had a necktie with a porcupine painted on it. I thought that necktie was just about the neatest thing in the world. Uncle Pete would stand patiently before me while I ran my fingers over the silky surface, half expecting to be stuck by one of the quills. Once, he let me wear it. I kept looking for one of my own, but I could never find one.

I was twelve when we moved from Pennsylvania to Arizona. When Uncle Pete came to say good-bye, he was wearing the tie. I thought he did so to give me one last look at it, and I was grateful. But then, with a dramatic flourish, he whipped off the tie and draped it around my neck. "It's yours," he said. "Going-away present."

I loved that porcupine tie so much that I decided to start a collection. Two years after we settled in Arizona, the number of ties in my collection was still one. Where do you find a porcupine necktie in Mica, Arizona—or anywhere else, for that matter?

On my fourteenth birthday, I read about myself in the local newspaper. The family section ran a regular feature about kids on their birthdays, and my mother had called in some info. The last sentence read: "As a hobby, Leo Borlock collects porcupine neckties."

Several days later, coming home from school, I found a plastic bag on our front step. Inside was a gift-wrapped package tied with yellow ribbon. The tag said "Happy Birthday!" I opened the package. It was a porcupine necktie. Two porcupines were tossing darts with their quills, while a third was picking its teeth.

I inspected the box, the tag, the paper. Nowhere could I find the giver's name. I asked my parents. I asked my friends. I called my uncle Pete. Everyone denied knowing anything about it.

At the time I simply considered the episode a mystery. It did not occur to me that I was being watched. We were all being watched.

"Did you see her?"

That was the first thing Kevin said to me on the first day of school, eleventh grade. We were waiting for the bell to ring.

"See who?" I said.

"Hah!" He craned his neck, scanning the mob. He had witnessed something remarkable; it showed on his face. He grinned, still scanning. "You'll know."

There were hundreds of us, milling about, calling names, pointing to summer-tanned faces we hadn't seen since June. Our interest in each other was never keener than during the fifteen minutes before the first bell of the first day.

I punched his arm. "Who?"

The bell rang. We poured inside.

I heard it again in homeroom, a whispered voice behind me as we said the Pledge of Allegiance:

"You see her?"

I heard it in the hallways. I heard it in English and Geometry:

"Did you see her?"

Who could it be? A new student? A spectacular blonde from California? Or from back East, where many of us came from? Or one of those summer makeovers, someone who leaves in June looking like a little girl and returns in September as a full-bodied woman, a ten-week miracle?

And then in Earth Sciences I heard a name: "Stargirl."

I turned to the senior slouching behind me. "Stargirl?" I said. "What kind of name is that?"

"That's it. Stargirl Caraway. She said it in homeroom."

*"Stargirl?"*

"Yeah."

And then I saw her. At lunch. She wore an off-white dress so long it covered her shoes. It had ruffles around the neck and cuffs and looked like it could have been her great-grandmother's wedding gown. Her hair was the color of sand. It fell to her shoulders. Something was strapped across her back, but it wasn't a book bag. At first I thought it was a miniature guitar. I found out later it was a ukulele.

She did not carry a lunch tray. She did carry a large canvas bag with a life-size sunflower painted on it. The lunchroom was dead silent as she walked by. She stopped at an empty

table, laid down her bag, slung the instrument strap over her chair, and sat down. She pulled a sandwich from the bag and started to eat.

Half the lunchroom kept staring, half started buzzing.

Kevin was grinning. "Wha'd I tell you?"

I nodded.

"She's in tenth grade," he said. "I hear she's been home-schooled till now."

"Maybe that explains it," I said.

Her back was to us, so I couldn't see her face. No one sat with her, but at the tables next to hers kids were cramming two to a seat. She didn't seem to notice. She seemed marooned in a sea of staring, buzzing faces.

Kevin was grinning again. "You thinking what I'm thinking?" he said.

I grinned back. I nodded. "Hot Seat."

*Hot Seat* was our in-school TV show. We had started it the year before. I was producer/director, Kevin was on-camera host. Each month he interviewed a student. So far, most of them had been honor student types, athletes, model citizens. Noteworthy in the usual ways, but not especially interesting.

Suddenly Kevin's eyes boggled. The girl was picking up her ukulele. And now she was strumming it. And now she was singing! Strumming away, bobbing her head and shoulders, singing, "I'm looking over a four-leaf clover that I overlooked before." Stone silence all around. Then came the sound of a single person clapping. I looked. It was the lunch-line cashier.

And now the girl was standing, slinging her bag over one shoulder and marching among the tables, strumming and singing and strutting and twirling. Heads swung, eyes followed her, mouths hung open. Disbelief. When she came by our table, I got my first good look at her face. She wasn't gorgeous, wasn't ugly. A sprinkle of freckles crossed the bridge of her nose. Mostly, she looked like a hundred other girls in school, except for two things. She wore no makeup, and her eyes were the biggest I had ever seen, like deer's eyes caught in headlights. She twirled as she went past, her flaring skirt brushing my pant leg, and then she marched out of the lunchroom.

From among the tables came three slow claps. Someone whistled. Someone yelped.

Kevin and I gawked at each other.

### **SEL/Comprehension Questions**

1. What was everyone's initial reaction to Stargirl when she came into the school's cafeteria? Provide evidence from the story in your answer.
2. What was everyone's reaction when Stargirl performed?
3. If Stargirl, or someone like her, came into your cafeteria, what would your reaction be?
4. Who was the only one who made Stargirl feel welcome?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### SEL Graphic Organizer: Character Matrix

The Character Matrix may be used along to help students understand and analyze the characters they are reading about.

Character Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Looks:**  
(Review the text  
for descriptive  
words)

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**Says:**  
(Look for quotes)

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**Conflicts:**  
(Problems or  
challenges this  
character faces)

--

--

--

**Acts/Behaves:**  
(Actions)

--

--

--

**How you feel  
About him/her:**

--

--

--

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SEL Graphic Organizer: STORY ELEMENTS CHART**

Identify the following story elements from the story you just read.

**Setting: (Where & When)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Characters: (Who the story is about and those who interact with him or her)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Plot: (Events that took place in the story)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

**Problem: (The difficulty a character is having)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Solution: (How the character solves the problem)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Theme: (The message or lesson the author wants to teach us)**

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Here is a list of descriptive words to help you identify a character's traits in the stories you read. As you learn new vocabulary words, you may add those words with similar meanings to these lists.

## CHARACTER TRAITS

### POSITIVE TRAITS

unselfish  
brave, courageous  
daring, bold  
adventurous  
kindhearted  
generous,  
considerate, caring  
active  
industrious  
determined, resolute  
persevering, persistent  
loyal  
respectful  
honest  
passive  
unique  
tough, hardened  
strong-minded  
comical  
skillful  
cheerful  
optimistic  
talented, gifted  
insightful, perceptive  
clever, ingenious  
wise  
creative, inventive  
patient  
tolerant

### NEGATIVE TRAITS

selfish, egotistical  
cowardly, weak  
meek, shy  
fearful  
coldhearted  
cheap, miserly  
uncaring, indifferent  
inactive  
lazy  
indecisive, wavering  
feeble  
disloyal  
disrespectful  
deceptive, dishonest  
aggressive  
ordinary  
vulnerable  
weak-minded  
dramatic  
awkward, clumsy  
depressed  
pessimistic  
untalented  
oblivious  
ignorant  
unwise  
unimaginative  
impatient  
intolerant