After Twenty Years by O. Henry

LITERARY FOCUS: OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW

The way a story is told depends on the point of view, or on who is telling the story. When the narrator of a story knows everything about everybody in a story, including their feelings, their pasts, and their futures, the story is being told from the omniscient point of view.

The paragraph below is written from the omniscient point of view. The column on the right helps you figure out why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Passage</th>
<th>The narrator . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) The mountain climbers were overwhelmed with a sense of their own smallness. (2) Ravi recalled the feeling he got as a boy when his grandfather took him to see the elephants. (3) Ravi had conquered his fear of the elephants by riding on their backs, and (4) in two weeks he would stand atop the jagged ridge he now faced.</td>
<td>1. reveals characters’ feelings 2. reveals a character’s thoughts 3. reveals past events 4. reveals future events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

READING SKILLS: MAKING PREDICTIONS

Nothing ruins a movie more than having someone who’s seen it tell you what will happen next. Much of the fun of watching a movie or reading a story is making predictions, or guessing at what is going to happen.

Use the tips below to make predictions.

- Look for clues that foreshadow, or hint at, what will happen next.
- Predict possible outcomes. Guess where the writer is leading, and revise your predictions as you go.
- Base predictions on your personal experiences, including reading experiences.
habitual (hə-bich′ō-l) adj.: done or fixed by habit.

The officer made his habitual check of the buildings.

intricate (in′trik′it) adj.: complicated; full of detail.

The officer twirled his club with intricate movements.

dismally (diz′māl′ē) adv.: miserably; gloomily.

People walked dismally through the rainy streets.

egotism (ē′gō·tiz′əm) n.: conceit; talking about oneself too much.

His egotism made him brag about his success.

simultaneously (si′mal-tā′nē-as′lē) adv.: at the same time.

Each man looked simultaneously at his friend’s face.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unfamiliar Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>uncontrollable</td>
<td>“not able to be controlled”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fashionista</td>
<td>“person who works in the fashion industry”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>globalize</td>
<td>“organize or establish worldwide”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely ten o’clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depopulated the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter, but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

When about midway of a certain block, the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him, the man spoke up quickly.

“It’s all right, officer,” he said reassuringly. “I’m just waiting for a friend. It’s an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn’t it? Well, I’ll explain if you’d like to make certain it’s all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands—‘Big Joe’ Brady’s restaurant.”

“Until five years ago,” said the policeman. “It was torn down then.”

1. pacific adj.: peaceful.
The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarf pin was a large diamond, oddly set.

“Twenty years ago tonight,” said the man, “I dined here at ‘Big Joe’ Brady’s with Jimmy Wells, my best chum and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn’t have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be.”
“It sounds pretty interesting,” said the policeman. “Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven’t you heard from your friend since you left?”

“Well, yes, for a time we corresponded,” said the other. “But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he’s alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest old chap in the world. He’ll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it’s worth it if my old partner turns up.”

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

“Three minutes to ten,” he announced. “It was exactly ten o’clock when we parted here at the restaurant door.”

“Did pretty well out West, didn’t you?” asked the policeman.

“You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I’ve had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor edge on him.”

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two. “I’ll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?”

“I should say not!” said the other. “I’ll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth, he’ll be here by that time. So long, officer.”

“Good night, sir,” said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally...
and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

“Is that you, Bob?” he asked, doubtfully.

“Is that you, Jimmy Wells?” cried the man in the door.

“Bless my heart!” exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other’s hands with his own. “It’s Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I’d find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant’s gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?”

“Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You’ve changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches.”

“Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty.”

“Doing well in New York, Jimmy?”

“Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we’ll go around to a place I know of and have a good long talk about old times.”

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a drugstore, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare, each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other’s face.

2. bully interj.: informal term meaning “very well.”
The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

“You’re not Jimmy Wells,” he snapped. “Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man’s nose from a Roman to a pug.”

“It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one,” said the tall man. “You’ve been under arrest for ten minutes, ‘Silky’ Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That’s sensible. Now, before we go to the station, here’s a note I was asked to hand to you. You may read it here at the window. It’s from Patrolman Wells.”

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar, I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn’t do it myself, so I went around and got a plainclothes man to do the job.

Jimmy
After Twenty Years

Point of View Questionnaire

This story is told by an omniscient narrator who knows all the story’s secrets. Complete the questionnaire to examine the way the point of view affects the theme of “After Twenty Years.”

1. What pronouns does the narrator use to describe the story’s characters?

2. Does the narrator reveal the inner thoughts of any of the characters? Explain.

3. How might this story differ if it were told by the policeman? List at least three points of difference, including what you would know and what you would not know.

4. How might this story be different if it were told from Silky Bob’s point of view? List at least three points of difference, including what you would know and what you would not know.

5. Think of the story’s theme—what it reveals about life. How could a different point of view affect the theme?
After Twenty Years

VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

A. Clarifying Word Meanings: Words and Word Parts  Match words and definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word. Then, circle familiar word parts in the Word Bank words. (Not all words will contain familiar word parts.)

 _____ 1. habitual  a. miserably; gloomily
 _____ 2. intricate  b. at the same time
 _____ 3. dismally  c. done or fixed by habit; customary
 _____ 4. egotism  d. complicated; full of detail
 _____ 5. simultaneously  e. conceit; talking about oneself too much

B. Reading Comprehension  Write T or F next to each statement to tell if it is true or false.

 _____ 1. The night was chilly, and the streets were empty.
 _____ 2. Jimmy and Bob had been writing to each other for twenty years.
 _____ 3. The two friends planned to meet at 10 P.M.
 _____ 5. Bob didn’t recognize Jimmy when he saw him.
Possible Answers to Skills Review

Comprehension (page 117)
1. Phaethon’s father is Helius, the Sun. His job is pulling the Sun across the sky behind his chariot.
2. Phaethon persuades his father by throwing stones at the palace windows and pulling up flowers in the garden.
3. The Olympians feel cold one minute and hot the next because Phaethon can’t control the spirited horses. The horses plunge up and down, dragging the chariot behind them.
4. Zeus throws a thunderbolt at Phaethon because he is disgusted with Phaethon’s behavior.
5. Phaethon is killed by Zeus’s thunderbolt, and his body falls into the River Po.

After Twenty Years, page 120

Page 122
VISUALIZE
Details that help students picture the setting are “up the avenue”; “spectators were few”; “The time was barely ten o’clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depeopled the streets”; “pacific thoroughfare”; “The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter, but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.”

IDENTIFY
The two characters the narrator introduces are a policeman and a man in the doorway of a darkened hardware store. The narrator is not taking part in the story.

Page 123
IDENTIFY
The words that tell about the agreement are “we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come.” In twenty years the man in the doorway would be thirty-eight, and Jimmy would be forty.

Page 124
PREDICT
Predictions will vary. Possible responses: Jimmy won’t show up because twenty years is a long time to remember that kind of agreement; the policeman is probably Jimmy because he happens to be at the right spot at the right time.

Page 125
IDENTIFY
The clues that tell you that Bob may be in for a surprise are the changes in Jimmy, especially his height—“I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches.”

Page 126
IDENTIFY
The detail that proves to Bob that he has been tricked is “Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man’s nose from a Roman to a pug.”

INTERPRET
Students’ clues will vary. Possible clues foreshadowing are “In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned with an unlighted cigar in his mouth”; “a little white scar near his right eyebrow”; “I’ve had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile.”

EVALUATE
The ending is unexpected because the policeman seen at the beginning of the story is actually Bob’s friend Jimmy. Jimmy sends a plainclothes person to arrest Bob. Students’ opinions about Jimmy’s arrest of his old friend will vary. Some students will say that Jimmy was only doing his job. His old friend Bob is a criminal wanted in Chicago. Jimmy chooses morality and the law over friendship. Other students will say that Jimmy should not have taken advantage of Bob’s eagerness to see him. They may point out that Jimmy was not even brave enough to make the arrest himself. He was ashamed to face his friend, and he felt guilty about turning him in.

Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Point of View Questionnaire (page 127)
1. he; him
2. The narrator knows everything about the characters but does not directly reveal their inner thoughts.
3. The policeman's identity would be revealed at the beginning. The policeman might reveal his inner thoughts to readers. He might tell readers that he recognizes Silky Bob and feels embarrassed about arresting him. Readers may dislike Silky Bob, but they wouldn't know about Bob's fondness for Jimmy Wells.

4. Silky Bob's inner thoughts might be revealed to readers. Readers would learn more about Jimmy Wells through Silky Bob's point of view. Readers may feel more sympathy for Silky Bob because he had an adventurous life, whereas Jimmy's life is rather ordinary. Readers might not learn about details of Silky Bob's appearance.

5. Possible response: If Silky Bob were telling the story, the theme might be “Beware of old friends that you haven’t seen in twenty years.”

Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 128)

A. 1. c
   2. d
   3. a
   4. e
   5. b
   
   Familiar word parts: habitual; dismal; egotism

B. 1. T
   2. F
   3. T
   4. T
   5. T

Names/Nombres, page 129

Page 131

INFER
Responses will vary. Possible responses: She’s annoyed because her mispronounced name sounds nothing like the “orchestra of sound” that her name makes when it’s pronounced correctly; she’s frustrated because the officer might not let them through immigration if she corrects his pronunciation.

Page 132

IDENTIFY
Julia is not sure she likes her new names. Julia’s mother thinks that names don’t matter much and that Julia should get used to her new names.

IDENTIFY
Possible responses: Julia doesn’t seem to mind being called Judy Alcatraz. She may even like it because her American names show that she’s a “popular kid,” even among her “troublemaking friends.” The essay is subjective; it expresses the narrator’s personal thoughts and feelings.

Page 133

IDENTIFY
Answers will vary. Possible answer: The main idea is that some first names can be difficult for people in foreign countries to pronounce and understand.

Page 134

IDENTIFY
Possible responses: Ana is different from her other sisters in that she is blond; that is, she does not look Hispanic. The second difference is that in college her friends pronounce her name correctly, as it should be pronounced in Spanish.

IDENTIFY
The details that tell why Julia changed her mind are “ethnicity was not yet ‘in,’ ” “I just wanted to be Judy and merge with the Sallys and Janes in my class.”

Page 135

INTERPRET
Possible responses: Julia misspells Puerto Rico because she is spelling it the way her classmates pronounce it.

INFER
Possible responses: Julia’s extended family is larger than her friends’ families. Their relationship to Julia is unusual, with godparents and close friends considered part of the family. Julia finds their presence at school occasions a “trial,” because they talk loudly to one another during the graduation ceremony, and she has difficulty introducing them to her friends because of their complicated names.