

## Cultural Background

Sixteen-year-old Jacob and his mother share a two room cabin on the outskirts of a small West Virginia town. Both mother and son feel tremendous alienation. She had come to the town sixteen years before as an unwed mother and had never been accepted by the townspeople as a social equal. Jake wears old clothes donated to charity, and dinner is often left-overs from the Smallmans' where his mother works as a maid. As the story opens, Jake is feeling particularly lonely because his best and only friend, Abbey Smallman, has rejected his proposal of marriage and their friendship is in jeopardy. Jake considers quitting school and going to another town to work in the coal mines where he can make a new start, support himself and cease to be a burden to his mother. As he packs to go, his mother comes home and they talk, and Jake realizes she is as lonely as he is and that she needs him. Knowing that he is needed makes Jake rethink his plans and adopt a more optimistic outlook.

## Before Students Read: Writing



Ask students to answer questions on the Student's Page (Part A) and to share their answers with another student. Then ask for volunteers to share their answers with the whole class. This activity takes advantage of students' prior knowledge of the story theme, which in turn aids comprehension.

## After Students Read: Writing



First, ask your students to make a list of all the things that upset Jacob. Then ask your students to finish the "Dear Mom" letter Jacob began to write. Ask them to state his reasons for leaving home, and include the feelings he has toward leaving.

## For Conversation

These questions may guide your students to a deeper understanding of how the story relates to their own lives.

1. What evidence is there that some of the townspeople are prejudiced? What is the nature of their prejudice? (Students may mention the taunting that Jake experiences at school, and the lack of sympathy shown by the town when his mother first arrives. They seem to look down on her because she is an unwed teenage mother and because they are poor.)
2. Is there anything Jake and/or his mother could do to become more integrated into the social life of the town? (Answers will vary. Students might suggest that her plan to attend the Fall Festival and Jake's decision to return to school are steps in the right direction. Also, they may have other ideas about things the characters might do if the story continued.)
3. What evidence is there that Jake and his mother are strong people? (They continue to live in the town despite the fact that they are "social lepers"; they are able to get by—earning a living and succeeding in school; and their love for each other is strong.)

# A Start

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

## Part A: Before You Read

Please respond to the following questions:

1. How do middle class people treat the poor in your community? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Is it difficult to do well in school if you are poor? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Part B: Grammar Review

There is no Grammar Review for this story.

## Part C: Vocabulary

Based on the way each word below is used in the story, **write** what you think the word means. Then **look up** the same word in your dictionary and copy the definition that comes closest to the way the word is used in the story. Finally, **write a sentence** of your own using the word. Use a separate sheet of paper.

**Example: maneuvers** (p. 67)

**A. Your definition:** *moves*

**B. Dictionary definition:** *a skillful act*

**C. Your new sentence:** *The lawyer's maneuvers impressed the jury.*

1. **limbs** (p. 59)

6. **entangling** (p. 63)

2. **servant** (p. 61)

7. **spotlessness** (p. 64)

3. **deserve** (p. 61)

8. **stationary** (p. 65)

4. **retreats** (p. 61)

9. **weariness** (p. 65)

5. **makeshift** (p. 62)

10. **ancient** (p. 67)

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

## Part D: Reading Check

After reviewing the story, please answer the following questions.

1. What is Jacob's ex-girlfriend's name? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Why did Jacob, when he was young, ask "where is my daddy (father)?" \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Where does Jacob sleep? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What does Jacob decide to cook? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Whom does his mother work for? \_\_\_\_\_

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