

**WORK IN  
A GROUP**

Discuss other problems in life that people need courage to overcome. Ask questions if you want to know more about what your classmates think. Discuss their answers.



## Focusing on "The Worst Morning"

### Think and Read

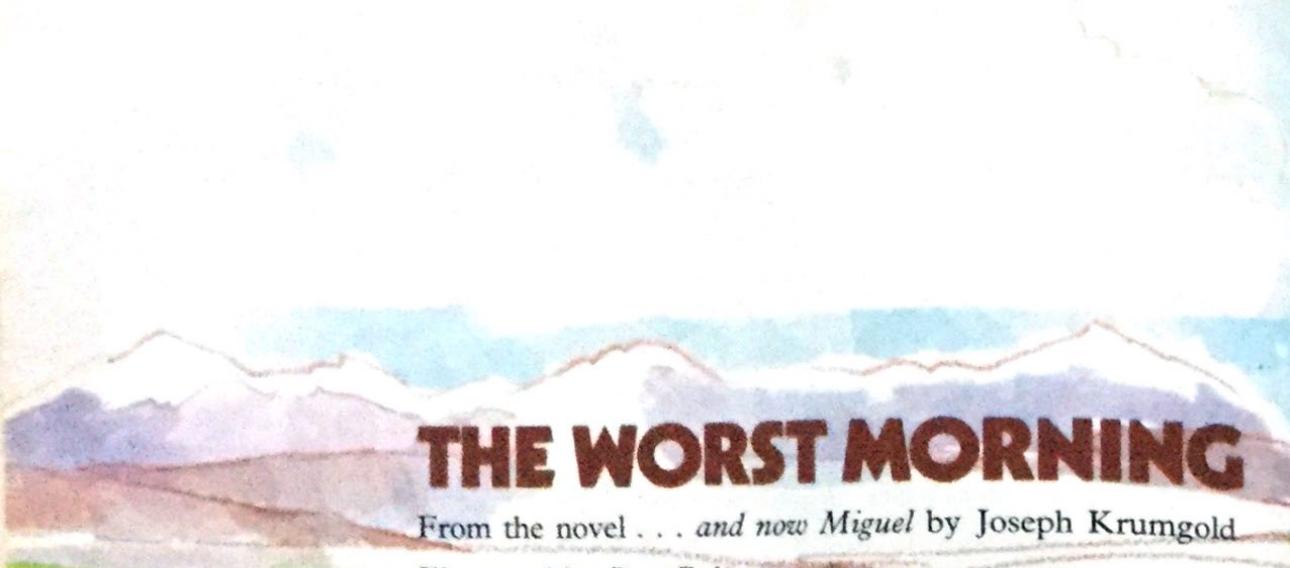
- ▶ Talk about a day that started out as a good day but did not end that way. Ask your classmates about experiences with days like that.
- ▶ Look at the title and pictures on pages 174–175. Think about your discussion of good days that turned bad.
  - Do the title and pictures seem to belong together? Explain why or why not.

Now look at the picture on page 186.

- How has the boy changed?
- What might have happened?
- ▶ Get ready to read about a boy named Miguel who starts the day feeling happy. As you read, notice how the boy's feelings change and what causes this change. Think about what you would include on this chart.

Things Miguel Did	Feelings Miguel Had

Now turn the page and read "The Worst Morning." Then you will talk about how good can come from a bad experience.



## THE WORST MORNING

From the novel . . . *and now Miguel* by Joseph Krungold

Illustrated by Don Bolognese



Each summer in New Mexico the days become very hot, and the lowland grass dies. It is then that the men of the Chavez<sup>1</sup> family drive their sheep high into the Sangre de Cristo<sup>2</sup> Mountains, where the grass stays green. For several years young Miguel<sup>3</sup> Chavez has been waiting for the time when his father will allow him to join the summer journey. During the past year, twelve-year-old Miguel has tried to show that he is ready to make the journey by working as hard as the adults. When a group of sheep becomes lost, it is Miguel who finds them and brings them safely home. And when sheep-shearing days begin, Miguel is given more responsible jobs than ever before. Miguel begins to hope that he is accepted, at last, as a working member of his family. Then comes the worst morning. Here is how Miguel tells about it.

1. Chavez (CHAH-vays)

2. Sangre de Cristo (SAHN-gray THAY KREES-toh)

3. Miguel (mee-GEHL)



Just to look at, the morning was all right. Or even, to tell the truth, it was a nice morning. The sun was shining and the shadows were long and heavy when we came out of the house. The sky was blue and big like there was more of it around than usual, more clear sky thin as deep water all around. Over the mountains there were clouds looking like a flock of sheep grazing around up there, big and little ones. And over the house, there were a couple of little ones, tramp clouds, like orphans. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains, they looked closer than I ever saw them before.

I felt good that morning when we all went out to finish the shearing. When we all walked out together, my grandfather told me to hang up the bag for the wool. The rest of the unshorn sheep had to be herded from the fields, where they had grazed all night, into the corral. All the other hands had to go out to round them up and bring them in. So it was up to me, my grandfather





said, to hang up the big sack. Me, that is, and Uncle Eli.<sup>4</sup>

I was glad to do this because hanging the sack, after all, is an important job which you don't ask anyone at all to do and which I had never been asked to do before. I knew how it worked, though, from watching.

First, Uncle Eli and I, we got this iron hoop, like a hoop off a barrel only thick and solid, and this

4. Eli (AY-lee).

hoop we put around the top outside the opening of the sack. Then we turned over the cloth of the sack, which is burlap, we turned it over the hoop all the way around. All that's left is to take some nails, which you use like they were pins, to fasten the turned-over burlap to the rest of the sack so that the hoop is all covered over and it can't fall off.

Once you do this, it's very easy to hang the sack. All you do then is to go up on the wall of the shed where is nailed this square wooden frame and drop the bottom of the empty sack through the frame. But the opening of the sack can't go through because the hoop is bigger than the wooden square and it rests on the square letting the sack hang down at its full length, six or seven feet. That's all there is to it.

But once we got the sack hung up, Uncle Eli said, "Stay up there, Miguelito.<sup>5</sup> We'll get started and sack up these fleeces from yesterday."

Down below there was a bin into which the fleeces are put by the men who tie them up, my father and grandfather. A dozen or so were left over from the afternoon before, covered by a tarpaulin to keep them from the wet and the dew during the night. Eli took off the tarp and started to hand up the fleeces to me standing high up where I was, on the wooden frame on top of the sack. I dropped the fleeces into the sack, one after another, as Eli handed them to me.

5. Miguelito (mee-gay'LEE-toh).

By this time the first bunch had been herded into the yard in front of the shearing shed, the clippers were working, the shearing was started. And through the window that is in the back of the shed more fleeces were already starting to come into the bin where Eli was. He kept handing them up to me. I kept dropping them into the sack.

I saw that my big brother Blasito<sup>6</sup> was sweeping with the broom, which was the job I did the day before. So I just stayed up on top there, sacking the wool. If anything, this is even a more important kind of work than sweeping, to stand way up on top there to take the fleeces the shearers had cut and my father had fied, and sack them up so we could take them to the buyer, Mr. Morrison. I never thought I'd be doing this for years yet. But no one said I shouldn't, so there I was up on top, sacking the wool. And by this time the fleeces were coming through the window pretty fast, and no one took any notice who was doing the work as long as it was getting done. Eli didn't have any more time to hand me the fleeces. He started throwing them up to me.

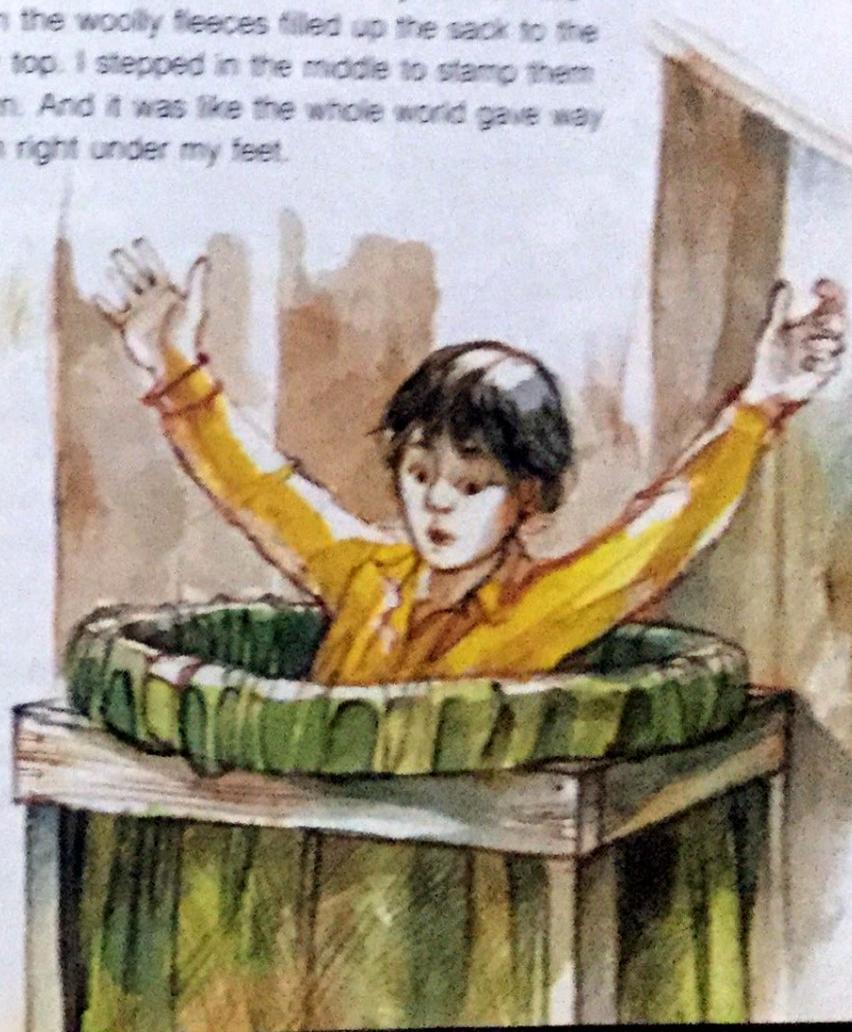
It was easy to catch them. And it was nothing at all to drop them in the sack. But this is not the important part of sacking the wool.

The important part is that the wool has to be packed tight. It must be stamped down so hard and solid that the sack gets to look like one big round sausage. It is not difficult to do. You wait

<sup>6</sup> Blasito (blah-SEE-to)

until the fleeces pile up and then you step in the middle of the bag and stamp up and down and jump with all your might until the wool is hard beneath your feet. You don't have to be afraid the bag will tear. It's made out of the best burlap, the strongest kind, and can hold even the biggest men, who are usually the ones that do the sacking.

So there I was up on top. Fleeces flying up from Uncle Eli. Everybody as busy and working as fast as they could, like on the day before. And soon the woolly fleeces filled up the sack to the very top. I stepped in the middle to stamp them down. And it was like the whole world gave way from right under my feet.



I dropped slowly down to the bottom of the sack. One long drop, and then a soft bump. There had not been enough fleeces to hold me up, not enough soft wool. I just went down, slow, and there was nothing to do. The sides of the bag, the burlap, were hard and rough with nothing to catch, not even with fingernails. Like going down a smooth tunnel standing straight up. There was no way to save myself. And yell, I couldn't yell. How could I yell and tell everyone what a fool I was to be falling that second into the bag which was for the wool?

I didn't yell.

I didn't breathe.

Outside nothing stopped. The clippers went on. And the gasoline engine went on. The sheep went on bawling like before. One lamb there was who kept crying louder than all the others, again and again. From the shearers there came a shout, "Sheep up, sheep up!" Someone laughed. And there was one somewhere singing. It was a song called "Chiapanecas"<sup>7</sup> which is also a dance. They played it at the fiesta. The singing came from far away, outside there. All these noises, I heard them in the same second. I myself made no noise. Not even to breathe.

I looked up. As if I was climbing up the rough cloth with my eyes, I looked up all the little criss-crosses of the cloth, and at the end I reached the top. Way up, high above me, I saw the sky, still

<sup>7</sup> Chiapanecas (chee-ah-pah-NAY-kahs).

blue like this morning but no longer big and wide. An eye, a round eye it was, way up at the end of the tunnel, still blue and with one tramp cloud, an orphan cloud.



I breathed. And then a shadow went past the eye. It was a fleece. And right away another. Eli, without looking, he was still throwing fleeces up to me and I wasn't there. The fleeces were going right over the top of the bag. Another came and another. And no one to catch them. I stretched



my hands, high, high, knowing I couldn't stretch high enough but stretching up anyway if only to beg they should stop. But over it came, another shadow. I grabbed at the bag around me, wishing I was a cat with claws. But there was nothing, the cloth was too tight and hard to grab. And still it came, another fleece sailing over the opening of the bag way up above.

There was a shout. "Miguel!"

Someone yelled. "What are you doing with the fleeces, Eli? Throwing them away?"

"Eli!"

"What?" That was Eli. "What's wrong? Well, what do you know! Miguel! Where is he? Miguel!"

The fleeces stopped. And everywhere, shouts. For me, Miguel.

"Ai, Miguel!"

"Miguel, where are you?"

"Where'd he go, Miguel?"

"Miguel!"

"Did you see Miguel?"

"Hey Miguel, Miguel! Speak up! Miguel!"

I didn't say anything. I wished only that my name was something different from Miguel. Alexander, Joe, Babaloo—anyone, except me.

"Miguel!"

It was my big brother Blasito who thought of it first. "Maybe he fell into the bag?"

Said one of the shearers, "Yeah, you better look in the bag."

Eli yelled, "Miguel, are you in there? Answer me, Miguel!"

"He's in there all right." It was Salph, the big, round shearer. "How do you like that? The boy fell in the bag."

"What do you think?" Everyone started to laugh, they roared. "Miguel's in the bag!"

Then I heard Johnny Marquez.<sup>8</sup> The man I thought was my friend. Mr. Marquez. Johnny was laughing harder than all the rest.

"Did you ever see anything like that Miguel?" He hit somebody on the back. I could hear it. "He gets tired of being a big man up there. So he jumps back into the sack and goes to sleep."

They screamed and yelled and laughed at how funny this was. There were also other jokes. When I looked up again it was just in time to see the face of my father come into the round blue hole way up there, above my head.

"He's here all right!" yelled my father. He looked down at me again. "What in Heaven's name, Miguel, do you think you're doing down there?"

I was breathing. That's all. But there was no need to tell him this.

"Is this any time to start playing games, hide and seek, like you were a little boy?"

When he said this I stopped breathing again.

He put down his hand. It hung there, big fingers and a big thumb, right in front of my nose.

"Come on, Miguel, let me get you out of this!" The thumb and one of the other fingers, they

<sup>8</sup> Marquez (MAHR+kays).

snapped. They made a loud noise, one, two, three times. "Miguel! Give me your hand. Up!"

I went back to breathing. But I didn't take the hand. Even when the fingers snapped again, loud and angry. I didn't want to go up. I wanted to stay down here, where there was a shadow and it was dark.

Out there it was bright and blue and the sky was big, and if I went up everyone could see from all around that it was me, Miguel. I could only stay down here, at the bottom of this tunnel. The fingers snapped again, and still I didn't move. The only thing I wanted now was that when I got pulled out I should be somebody different from who I was—Alexander, or Joe, or Babaloo. Not me, Miguel.

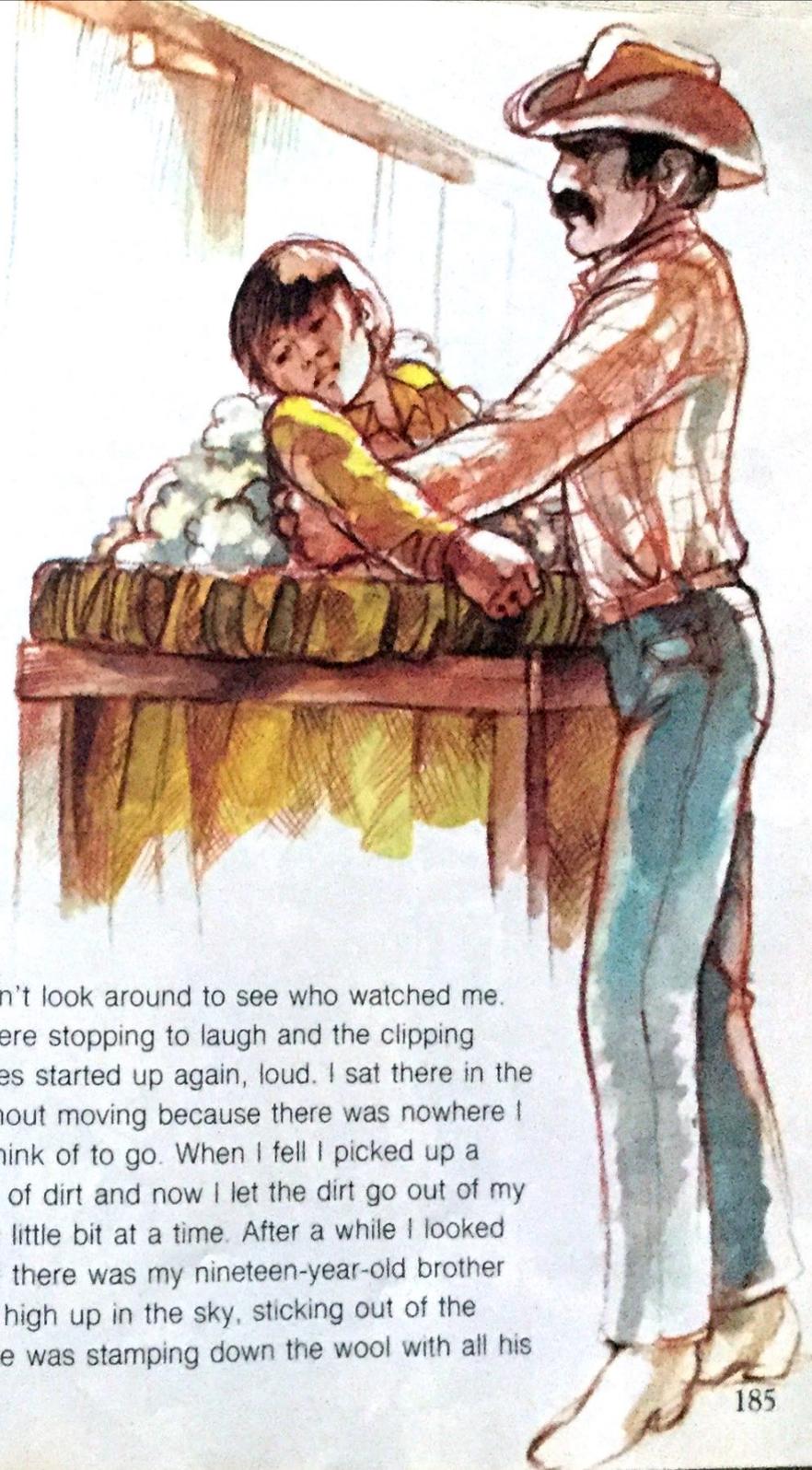
My father was angry. "Give me your hand, Miguel, or I'll pull you out by the scruff of your neck. Now come on! Up!"

The big finger, upside down, shook at me. I put up my hands and took the hand hanging there in front of my nose. As soon as I did, my father grabbed me by the wrist.

"Games," he said. "At a time like this."

He lifted me up into the bright day. He dropped me over the side. I fell into the dirt at the bottom of the sack. Up above my father yelled, "Gabriel, get over here! And get those fleeces out of the rubbish. Come on, *hombres*,<sup>9</sup> we got a day's shearing yet to do."

<sup>9</sup> *hombres* (OHM-brays).

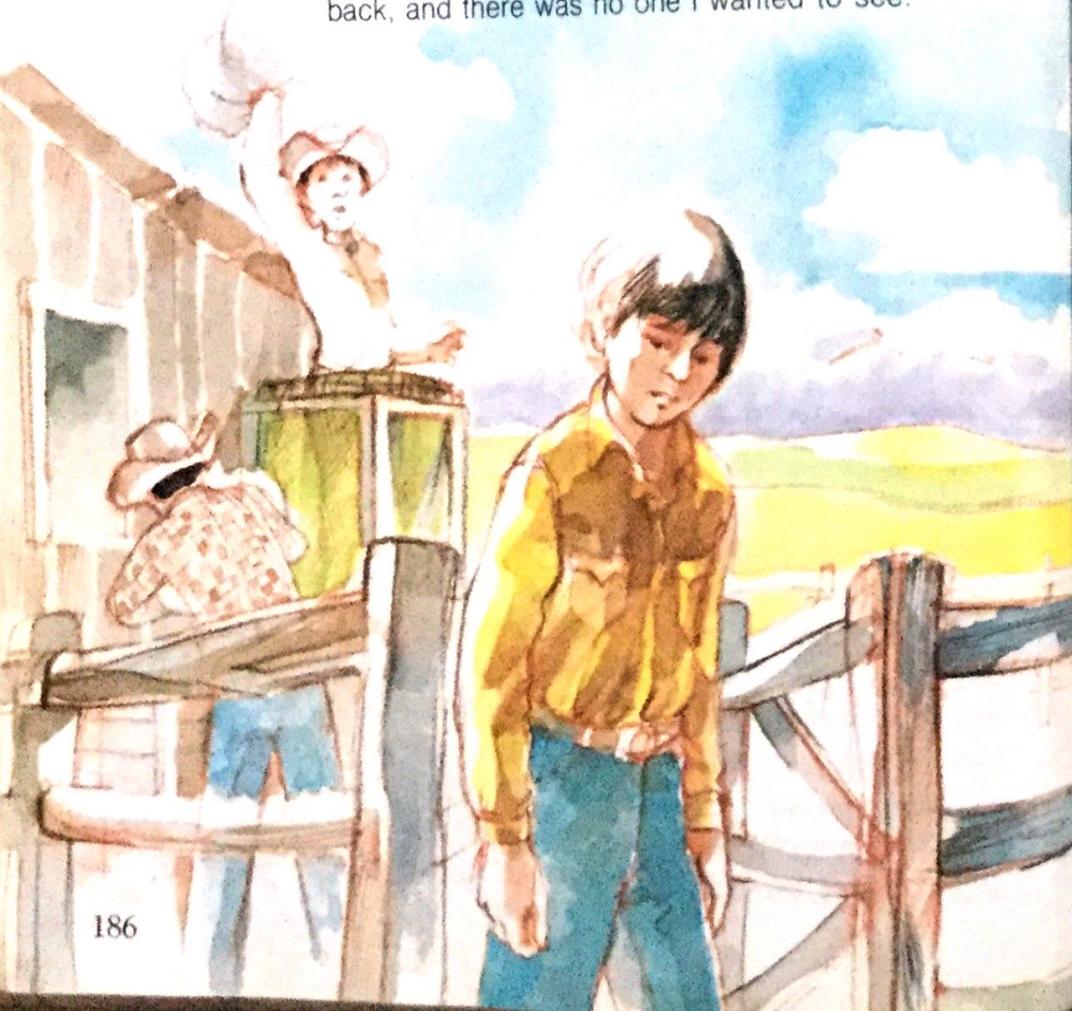


I didn't look around to see who watched me. They were stopping to laugh and the clipping machines started up again, loud. I sat there in the dirt without moving because there was nowhere I could think of to go. When I fell I picked up a handful of dirt and now I let the dirt go out of my hand, a little bit at a time. After a while I looked up, and there was my nineteen-year-old brother Gabriel high up in the sky, sticking out of the sack. He was stamping down the wool with all his

might, and at the same time he caught the fleeces that Eli was throwing up to him. He turned round and round up there, pushing down the wool solid and tight the way it should be, Gabriel with all the blue and the clouds behind him.

Whatever dirt there was left in my hand, I threw it away.

I made myself small and I got up. I walked away from the shearing shed across the yard, without looking back. No one called me to look back, and there was no one I wanted to see.

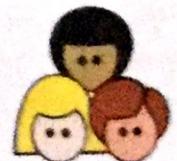


Think about the story. Finish the chart on page 173 by filling in the information about Miguel. Then answer the questions.

1. Use your chart. When does Miguel seem to be enjoying himself most? Why do you think as you do?
2. When does Miguel's good day begin to turn into a bad day?
3. Do you think this story belongs in a unit about people who never give up? Explain why or why not.
4. If Miguel believed in never giving up, what might he have done differently?
5. As he sits in the dirt, why does Miguel not look around to see who is watching?
6. When Miguel says, "I made myself small and I got up," what does he mean? How does this compare to how Miguel felt at the beginning of the story?
7. Why does Miguel not say anything when he falls into the sack?
8. Do you agree it was better not to say anything? Explain why or why not?

Talk about the good results that could come from Miguel's bad experience. Ask questions about your classmates' ideas. Talk about their answers.

## Think and Discuss



WORK IN A GROUP



# Learn About STORIES

## Characters to Remember

Think about some favorite characters in stories you have read. Were they brave? determined? clever? honest? wicked? These are all *traits*. A character's traits are what make that character stand out in your mind. They are what make a character someone you are likely to remember.

A character's traits may be learned from what the character says. What traits do you detect in Sam from this brief conversation in "Something for Davy"? In this scene, Sam has just persuaded his mother to give him three dollars and fifty cents from his savings.

"I think that's too much to spend on a present for Davy," Mother said. "A dollar would be plenty."

"Mother!" I exclaimed. I was shocked. "If I had a thousand dollars it wouldn't be too much to spend."

"Davy wouldn't want you to spend all your money on him. You know that."

"I want to spend all my money on Davy," I said. "Davy never has to know."

"It's your money, but I think you're crazy. You don't need to spend money to show love."

"It's the only way," I said. "The hospital won't let me in to see him."



*Outspoken, loyal, determined*—these are all traits that can be found in Sam's conversation.

A character's traits may also be learned from what the author tells us. What traits do you detect in Ariadne from this scene in "A Hero's Promise"? In the scene, the author describes a dinner given by King Minos for his Athenian "guests." The dinner conversation is soon interrupted by the thundering growls of the Minotaur.

King Minos clearly enjoyed his guests' dismay. Not so his daughter, Ariadne, who admired Theseus' dignity and calm. She asked about his exploits on the road to Athens and listened entranced while he told her about them. She could not bear to think of the miserable death that awaited him and his companions next morning.



*Sensitive, fair-minded, perhaps even lonely*, are traits you may detect in the character of Ariadne. These traits show more clearly when, alone with Theseus, she supplies him with a dagger to kill the Minotaur.

"Tomorrow I shall owe my life to you," said Theseus. "Dearest princess, what can I do for you in return?"

"Make me your wife and take me back to Greece," said Ariadne, and the tears welled up in her eyes. "I am lonely and unhappy here. The palace is full of soldiers; the talk is of nothing but wars and fighting. And at night the monster bellows so loudly that I cannot sleep. I beg you to take me away."

You've seen that a character's traits can be shown in several ways—through the words and actions of the characters themselves and through the words of others. Now read some paragraphs about other characters from the stories in this book. Match the characters

with one or more of the traits in the list on this page. Choose only those traits that describe the characters in the examples given here. You may want to use some traits more than once, but not all the traits need to be used. Add new ones if you need them.

### Character Traits

cheerful	outspoken	wise	determined	curious
sensible	thoughtful	cautious	sensitive	caring
brave	careful	kind	honest	proud
funny	friendly	adventurous	bold	dignified



1. Mr. Wigg in "Laughing Gas"

"I'd better explain, I think," Mr. Wigg went on calmly. "You see, it's this way. I'm a cheerful sort of man and very disposed to laughter. You wouldn't believe, either of you, the number of things that strike me as being funny. I can laugh at pretty nearly everything, I can."

And with that Mr. Wigg began to bob up and down, shaking with laughter at the thought of his own cheerfulness.

### 2. Miguel in "The Worst Morning"



I saw that my big brother Blasito was sweeping with the broom, which was the job I did the day before. So I just stayed up on top there, sacking the wool. If anything, this is even a more important kind of work than sweeping, to stand way up on top there to take the fleeces the shearers had cut and my father had tied, and sack them up so we could take them to the buyer, Mr. Morrison. I never thought I'd be doing this for years yet. But no one said I shouldn't, so there I was up on top, sacking the wool.

### 3. Katharine in "The Tournament"

"I wish I could fight ten times as well as you, you bully! Yah!" were the words that the valiant Sir Kath spoke upon the field. It was a cry of pure temper. . . . What followed would have to be seen to be believed. Katharine came down like several wolves on the fold.



Knowing a character's traits may help you describe that character to someone else. Imagine that you've been asked to introduce your favorite book character to your class. Write one paragraph in which you introduce the character. Before you write, make a list of the traits you may want to mention.