

Catherine's Pascha: Literary Analysis for older children

Author's Purpose

Applicable Common Core standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 – Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

In general, texts are written with one of three primary purposes in mind:

- **To entertain:** Novels, plays, poems, and stories are usually written to entertain
- **To inform:** Works of nonfiction (such as history or biography), instructions, text books, and encyclopedia articles are usually written to inform
- **To persuade:** Advertisements, editorials, homilies, and political speeches are usually written to persuade

The author's purpose is always directed towards a particular audience. Therefore, when you identify the author's purpose, you should include describe the audience the author wants to entertain, or to inform, or to persuade. In addition, if the purpose is to inform or to persuade, you should identify what information the author wants to convey, or what position the author wants to persuade their audience to take.

For example, author's purpose for the instructions for the game Monopoly is to inform players ages 8 and older how to play the game.

Of course, many texts fill more than one purpose. For example, the primary purpose of a novelist is to entertain, so it is safe to say that Josphine Tey's purpose in writing the classic detective novel, *Daughter of Time*, was to entertain teen and adult readers. However, Tey also wanted to inform her readers about the life of Richard III of England, and to persuade her readers that he was a good man who did not murder his nephews. When Shakespeare wrote about Richard III, he also wanted to entertain his audience. But he also wanted to persuade them that Richard was as nasty and awful and terrible as it's possible for a man to be.

1. Identify Charlotte Riggle's primary purpose in writing *Catherine's Pascha*. Be sure to include the audience in your description of the author's purpose.
2. Describe other purposes that Riggle may have wanted to accomplish.

Point of view

Applicable Common Core standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 – Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

The point of view is also called the narrative perspective. Understanding the point of view helps you understand the relationship between the person telling the story (the narrator) and the people referred to by the story teller (the characters).

There are five standard narrative perspectives in literature:

- **First-person:** The narrator tells his or her own story, using "I" or "we." *A Visit from St. Nicholas* (better known as *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*) by Clement Clark Moore uses a first-person point of view, as does *Catherine, Called Birdie* by Karen Cushman.
- **Second-person:** The narrator explains what "you" do or did. This is the usual point of view for instructions, but it's unusual for a story. *The Monster at the End of this Book* by Jon Stone (featuring lovable, furry old Grover) uses a second-person point of view.
- **Third-person objective:** The narrator tells someone else's story as if watching it in a movie; the narrator does not tell you what any character thinks or feels or knows, but only what they say or do, and it is up to you to infer the characters' feelings by their words or actions. Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham* is written in third-person objective.
- **Third-person limited:** The narrator tells someone else's story from the point of view of a single character, telling you what that character thinks and feels and knows and not what any other character thinks and feels and knows. *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak is written in third-person limited.
- **Third-person omniscient:** The narrator tells someone else's story, telling you what more than one character thinks and feels and knows. *The House at Pooh Corner* by A.A. Milne and *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman are written in third-person omniscient.

In addition, with any narrative perspective, the narrator can be **reliable** or **unreliable**. If the story is told by a reliable narrator, you can trust what the narrator says. If the narrator is unreliable, you may need to look for additional clues to determine what is really going on in the story.

Keep in mind that a picture book like *Catherine's Pascha* has a great deal in common with a play or a movie. The visuals are not just decorative; they are an integral part of the work and must be considered together with the text in your analysis.

1. Identify at least one story or other written work that uses each of the narrative perspectives.
2. Determine the narrative perspective of *Catherine's Pascha*. Explain how you were able to identify the point of view.
3. Is the narrator in *Catherine's Pascha* reliable or unreliable? How could you tell?
4. Select a character other than the narrator, and describe the narrator's relationship with that character.

Theme

Applicable Common Core standard

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 – Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

You know how Aesop’s Fables and the VeggieTales stories all end with “The moral of the story”? The moral of the story is the theme. It’s not the plot. It’s not the story. It’s what the author wants you to think about when you’re done reading the story.

Most writers won’t tell you what their theme is, though. Aesop did. But Dr. Seuss doesn’t. Nor J.K. Rowling. Nor pretty much anyone else. You have to read the story, and think about it, and figure out what the message is that they writer wants to get across. That’s not always easy to do.

Remember, a theme isn’t specific to the story. The theme of the Frog Princess isn’t, “The princess shouldn’t break her promise to the frog.” The theme might be, “Bad things happen when you make promises that you don’t intend to keep.”

1. Explain the theme of *Catherine’s Pascha*. Include supporting details from the story. Remember, when you’re analyzing a picture book, you should look at both pictures and words.
2. Two very different stories can share similar themes. Tell a story that has the same theme as *Catherine’s Pascha*, but that uses different characters and different events to make the point.

Characterization

Applicable Common Core standard

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 – Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

There are three types of characters to understand:

- **Protagonist:** The main character in the story, the character that the story is about. It isn’t necessarily the character in named in the title. In the Batman comics and movies, the protagonist is of course Batman (aka Bruce Wayne). In *The Call of the Wild*, however, the protagonist is Buck, a dog.
- **Antagonist:** A character or, in some cases, a condition or an impersonal force that works against the goals of the main character.
- **Foil:** A character who contrasts with the protagonist (or sometimes another character) to clarify or reveal particular qualities of the other character. The foil may be very much like the main character, except for one important difference. Or the foil may be the exact opposite of the main character.

Characters may be described in a number of ways. One important feature of a character is whether that character changes over the course of a story.

- A character that is **dynamic** changes significantly.
- A character that is **static** does not change significantly.

Characters may also be described by how complex they are.

- A complex character, with many different sides, is described as **round**.
- A simple character that has only a few traits is described as **flat**.

Because dynamic characters have to change, and because you have to know a lot about a character to understand and care about the change, dynamic characters are almost always round. The protagonist in a story that is primarily about the character will usually be dynamic and round. If a dynamic character is flat, that's usually a sign of bad writing.

Static characters, on the other hand, can be either flat or round, without it necessarily being a reflection of the quality of the writing.

- Incidental characters, such as the officers in red shirts on a Star Trek away team, are almost always static and flat. This is completely appropriate. It takes time, in a story, to develop a character from flat to round, and giving a minor character that amount of time would muddle the story and distract the readers.
- Supporting characters, such as Dr. Watson in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, are often rich, complex characters: in other words, they are static and round.
- In a series, or in a story that is more about what happens than about who it happens to, even main characters may be static.

This table may help you remember which sorts of characters are likely to be round or flat, dynamic or static.

	Dynamic	Static
Round	Main characters in character-based stories	Supporting characters Main characters in a series Main characters in plot-based stories
Flat		Incidental characters

Beyond change and complexity, characters are also described by what sort of people they are. What kind of personality do they have? Are they cheerful? Hostile? Irritating? How do they treat other people? Are they kind and gentle? Are they cruel? Are they stubborn and independent? Are they shy?

1. Write brief character descriptions of Catherine and of Elizabeth.
2. Describe how Catherine interacts with her brother, Peter. Use the character description you wrote about Catherine to explain why she interacts with Peter the way she does.

Text structure

Applicable Common Core standard

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 - Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

There are seven common patterns of organization for texts:

- **Chronological:** Events are arranged according to the passage of time. Stories that have a beginning, a middle, and an end use chronological order. And that's true even when the writer tells you the end at the beginning! It's still organized by time, so it's still chronological order.
 - **Sequence:** Information is organized according to the order in which it occurs. It's a bit like chronological order – except that chronological order is tied to a particular place and time, and sequence isn't. If you tell someone that you went to Language arts class, then history, then PE, that's chronological order. If you tell them that your schedule is Language arts is first period, history is second period, and PE is third period, that's organized according to sequence. Stories are in chronological order. Instructions, schedules, and recipes are sequenced.
 - **Cause and effect:** Events are arranged according to causality. You might give the effects first, and work back to the cause. Or you might start with the cause and go to the effects. But if the text explains that one thing happened (or might happen, or will happen) because of another thing, that text is organized by cause and effect.
 - **Problem and solution:** Information is presented as a problem followed by something that will fix the problem. It can be similar to cause and effect. The difference is that cause-and-effect text doesn't judge the events as good or bad. They just are. If you said that throwing a rock at a window (cause) results in broken glass (effect), that's cause and effect. If you say the playground to be unsafe to play in because of all the broken glass (problem), and the broken glass can be prevented if people stop throwing rocks (solution), that's problem and solution.
 - **Compare and contrast:** Information is presented about how two things are the same (comparison) and how they're different (contrast).
 - **Order of importance:** Information is arranged according to importance. You can start with the most important item or point and work to the least important, or you can start with the least important and work to the most important. It's useful to organize a list of things that you have to get done today by importance.
 - **Spatial:** The text is organized by where things are located. If you're describing your house, and you start from the front door and work your way through the living room, kitchen, bedrooms, and so on, you're using a spatial organization.
1. Catherine's family takes Pascha baskets with them when they go to church. Compare and contrast those Pascha baskets with the Pascha basket that your family takes to church, with an Easter basket that you've received, or with a picnic basket.
 2. Look at one of the spreads in *Catherine's Pascha*. (A spread is two adjacent pages viewed side-by-side.) Use a spatial organization to describe what you see.
 3. How do the words in the frames around the main pictures in each spread relate to the story? Why are some of the words in the frames, and some of the words under the pictures?