

WE READ AND DISCUSS



William Saroyan (1908—1981) first appeared on the literary scene of the United States in the mid-thirties. Highly original short stories made him one of the most talked-about writers in America.

These were followed by plays and short stories that were even more enthusiastically received.

Saroyan's stories are richly funny and humane. He is a very honest writer. He writes clearly, without pose, about what can happen to people — and does so often happen, both accidentally and purposefully. Saroyan has a real love and compassion for common people, and a deep understanding of their dignity. He always makes his reader sympathize with them and share in their sufferings.

Saroyan had little schooling, but he was a keen observer of life, and almost all the episodes described in his works are taken either from his own life or from the life of the people who came in touch with him. Saroyan likes his characters, a rare thing in modern fiction, and he persuades his reader to accept them — and in some way to accept the comic and pathetic nature in us all.

William Saroyan published more than thirty books and plays. His best-known novel is *The Human Comedy*. Among his most popular works are *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson*, *Rock Wagram*, *The Laughing Matter*, *Boys and Girls Together*, and *One Day in the Afternoon of the World*.

WILLIAM SAROYAN

45 *Read the words and word combinations and guess their meaning. Pay attention to the suffixes.*

-ness: aware — awareness; an awareness that here was a truly original mind.

-en: threat — threaten; a brilliant man came and threatened the principal.

-ly: frequent — frequently; she was frequently seen by students; honest — honestly; he was glad to say honestly; clear — clearly; he recalled quite clearly; safe — safely; the boy got out of the room safely.

Cultural Note:

Stonehenge [ˌstounˈhɛndʒ] a group of large, tall stones arranged in circles which stand on Salisbury Plain, South England. They were put there in pre-historic times (about 2500–1500 BC), perhaps as a religious sign or perhaps as a way to study the sun, moon, and stars. Stonehenge is a popular tourist attraction.

46 *Read the proper names which you will come across in the story **Out of Order**:*

William ['wɪljəm] Saroyan [sɑ:'roujɑ:n],
Miss Shenstone ['ʃɛnstən],
Mr. Monsoon ['mɒnsən],
Uncle Aleksander [ˌælk'sɑ:ndə].

47 *Read the story **Out of Order** and answer the question:*

- What was the cause of the conflict between William Saroyan and the teacher?

Out of Order

Longfellow High was not strictly speaking a high school at all. It was the seventh and eight grades of a grammar school, and its full name was Longfellow Junior High School.

It was in Ancient History that I first astonished my class into an awareness that here was a truly original mind. It happened that this was the first class of the very first day. The teacher was a woman of forty or so. She smoked cigarettes, laughed loudly with other teachers during the lunch hour, and had frequently been seen by the students running suddenly, pushing, and acting gay. She was called Miss Shenstone by the students and Harriet or Harry by the other teachers. Ancient-history books were distributed to the class, and Miss Shenstone asked us to turn to page 192 for the first lesson.

I remarked that it would seem more in order to turn to page one for the first lesson.

I was asked my name, whereupon¹ I was only too glad to say honestly, "William Saroyan."

"Well, William Saroyan," Miss Shenstone said, "I might say, Mister William Saroyan, just shut up and let me do the teaching of Ancient History in this class."

Quite a blow.²

On page 192, I recall quite clearly, was a photograph of two rather common-looking stones which Miss Shenstone said were called Stonehenge. She then said that these stones were twenty thousand years old.

It was at this point that my school of thought and behaviour was started.

"How do you know?" I said.

This was a fresh twist¹ to the old school: the school of thought in which the teachers asked the questions and students tried to

¹ **whereupon** [ˌweə'əpɒn] — после чего

² **blow** — зл.: удар

answer them. The entire class expressed approval of the new school. What happened might be accurately described as a demonstration. The truth of the matter is that neither Miss Shenstone, or Harry (as she enjoyed being called), nor Mr. Monsoon himself, the principal², had anything like a satisfactory answer to any legitimate³ question of this sort, for they (and all the other teachers) had always accepted what they had found in the textbooks.

Instead of trying to answer the question, Miss Shenstone compelled⁴ me to demonstrate the behaviour of the new school. That is, she compelled me to run. She flung⁵ herself at me with such speed that I was hardly able to get away. For half a moment she clung to my homeknit sweater, and damaged it before I got away. Instead of remaining in one's seat in a crisis, it was better to get up and go. The chase⁶ was an exciting one, but I got out of the room safely. Five minutes later, believing that the woman had calmed down, I opened the door to step in and return to my seat, but again she flung herself at me, and again I got away.

Rather than wait for the consequences, I decided to present my case to Mr. Monsoon himself, but when I did so, I was amazed to find that his sympathies were with Miss Shenstone and that he looked upon me with loathing⁷.

"She said the rocks were twenty thousand years old," I said. "All I said was, 'How do you know?' I didn't mean they weren't that old. I meant that maybe they were older, maybe thirty thousand years old. How old is the earth? Several million years old, isn't? If the book can say the rocks are twenty thousand years old, somebody ought to be able to say how the book got that figure. I came here to learn. I don't expect to be punished because I want to learn."

"Your name again, please?" Mr. Monsoon said.

"William Saroyan," I said as humbly⁸ as possible, although I must confess⁹ it was not easy to do.

"You are?" Mr. Monsoon said.

"Eleven," I said.

"No. I don't mean that."

"One hundred and three pounds."

"No, no. The name, I'm thinking of."

"And nationality," Mr. Monsoon said.

"Armenian," I said proudly.

"Just as I thought," the principal said.

"Just as you thought what?"

"Nobody but an Armenian would have asked a question like that."

"How do you know?" I said, giving the new school another whirl¹⁰.

"Nobody did," the principal said. "Does that answer your question?"

"Only partly," I said. "How do you know somebody else would not have asked it if I hadn't?"

"In all the years that I have been connected with the public school system of California," Mr. Monsoon said, "no one has ever asked such a question."

"Yes," I said quickly, "and in all the years before Newton wanted to know what made the apple fall, nobody wanted to know what made it fall."

I was brilliant. It's not my fault nobody else was.

Mr. Monsoon chose not to continue the discussion. He just sat and looked at his shoes.

"How about that?" I said.

"Well," he said rather wearily¹¹. "I must give you a thrashing¹². "How about that?"

"For what?" I said.

I got to my feet, watching the stenographer, whose desk was beside the door. This was a rather pretty girl, and I hoped to make a favourable impression on her, although I can't imagine what I expected to come of it."

"Miss Slifo," Mr. Monsoon said, but that was all I needed to hear, and before Miss Slifo was able to block my way, I was at the door, out of the room, and just about halfway across the school grounds.

Once again, the behaviour of the new school had been tested and found true. I went home and found my Uncle Aleksander who was studying law at the University of Southern California, on a visit at our house, drinking coffee. I told him the story. He invited me into his car and we took off for Longfellow High School.

"That's the story, just as you've told it to me?" he said as we rode.

"That's exactly how it happened."

¹ twist — поворот

² principal — *зд.*: директор школы

³ legitimate [lɪ'dʒɪtɪmət] — законный

⁴ to compel [kəm'pel] — заставить, вынудить

⁵ to fling (flung, flung) — кидаться, бросаться

⁶ chase [tʃeɪs] — погоня

⁷ loathing ['lɒdɪŋ] — отвращение

⁸ humbly — смиренно, покорно

⁹ to confess [kən'fes] — признавать, признать

¹⁰ whirl — оборот

¹¹ wearily ['wiəriɪli] — утомленно, потеряв терпение

¹² thrashing — палочные удары, взбучка

"All right," my Uncle Aleksander said. "You wait in the car."

I don't know what my Uncle Aleksander and Mr. Monsoon said to one another, but after a few minutes Miss Slifo came out to the car and said, "Your uncle and Mr. Monsoon and Miss Shenstone would like to see you in the office."

I went in and my uncle said, "There are men who know how to determine the approximate age of different things in the world and on the earth. Who these men are and how they determine these things, Mr. Monsoon does not know, and neither does Miss Shenstone. Miss Shenstone has promised to look into the matter. On your part, you may ask any questions you like, but in a more co-operative and polite tone of voice." He turned to the principal. "Is that in accordance with our understanding?"

"Quite," the principal said.

"It was with admiration that Mr. Monsoon remarked that only an Armenian would have asked a question like that," my Uncle Aleksander went on. "Is that correct, Mr. Monsoon?"

"It is," Mr. Monsoon said. "in a city with a population of ten or three thousand of them, I could hardly —"

"With admiration, then," my Uncle Aleksander said. He turned to me.

"You will spend the rest of this day away from school, but tomorrow you will return to classes as though nothing had happened."

"Is that also in accordance with our understanding?" he asked the principal.

"I was wondering if he might not be transferred² to another school," the principal said, but my uncle said quickly, "He lives in this district. His friends come to this school. I shall be interested in his progress."

"We all shall," the principal said.

I could not have been more ill at ease³, or more angry at my uncle. The very thing I had always despised⁴ had just taken place, that is to say, a brilliant man had come to my defence, a circumstance I could hardly be expected to enjoy.

A brilliant man, who happened to be my mother's younger brother, has stepped in

among the great figures of the school, belittled⁵ and threatened them; and they, instead of fighting back, had let him get away with it. Well, I didn't want him to get away with it.

The following day I presented myself to Mr. Monsoon, who, when he saw me, appeared to want to close his eyes and to go to sleep.

"I've come to apologize," I said. "I don't want any special privileges."

"Just ask your questions in a polite tone of voice," the man said. "You may go now."

He refused to open his eyes.

I went straight to the ancient-history class, where I found Miss Shenstone at her desk.

"I'm sorry about the trouble I made," I said. "I won't do it again."

For a moment I thought she was about to fling herself at me again, but without looking up from her work, she said very dryly, "They have a way of determining such things. You may go now."

I felt sure the principal and the teacher would one day remember how wonderfully I behaved in this unfortunate affair, but as I've said, they didn't, and so I have had to.

Miss Shenstone taught at Longfellow only another four days. A series of substitute teachers⁶ took over the teaching of the ancient-history class, but now the new school was in full operation throughout Longfellow High, and the substitutes were always eager to finish out a day or a week and be gone forever.

Mr. Monsoon, too, left the school and was succeeded by a man who tried the method of brute⁷ force at first, thrashing as many as three dozen boys a day, and then he tried the method of taking the worst boys into his confidence⁸, going for walks with them through the schoolgrounds, being friendly and so on; but neither of these methods worked, and after the first semester, the man accepted a post at a small country school with only forty or fifty students.

As for myself, I transferred to another school in order to learn typing.

¹ in accordance with — в соответствии с

² to transfer [træns'fə:] — переводить, переходить

³ ill at ease — не по себе

⁴ to despise [dɪ'spraɪz] — презирать

⁵ to belittle — принижать

⁶ substitute teacher — заменяющий учитель

⁷ brute [bru:t] — грубый

⁸ to take into one's confidence — доверить (кому-то) свои тайны

48 *Read the sentences and translate them. Pay attention to the use of the modal verbs.*

- 1 What happened **might** be accurately described as a demonstration.
- 2 "Somebody **ought** to be able to say how the book got that figure."
- 3 "I **might** say, just shut up and let me do the teaching of Ancient History in this class."
- 4 "William Saroyan," I said as humbly as possible, although I **must** confess it was not easy to do.

49 *Translate the sentences. Pay attention to the use of the grammar forms in bold.*

- 1 I remarked that it **would have seemed** more in order to turn to page one for the first lesson.
- 2 "Nobody but an Armenian **would have asked** a question like that."
- 3 "How do you know somebody else **would not have asked** it if I **hadn't**?"
- 4 Tomorrow you will return to classes as though nothing **had happened**."

50 *Read and translate:*

- 1 I first astonished my class into an awareness that here was a truly original mind.
- 2 Rather than wait for the consequences, I decided to present my case to Mr. Monsoon himself, but when I did so, I was amazed to find that his sympathies were with Miss Shenstone and that he looked upon me with loathing.
- 3 I could not have been more ill at ease, or more angry at my uncle.
- 4 A brilliant man had come to my defence, a circumstance I could hardly be expected to enjoy.
- 5 The following day I presented myself to Mr. Monsoon.
- 6 Now the new school was in full operation, and the substitutes were always eager to finish out a day or a week and be gone forever.
- 7 He first tried the method of brute force, and then he tried the method of taking the worst boys into his confidence, going for walks with them, being friendly and so on.

51 *Answer the questions:*

- 1 What made the teacher of Ancient History angry when her first lesson of the school year began?
- 2 Did the class approve of Saroyan's curiosity and his eagerness to find out the accuracy of the teacher's words? How did they?
- 3 What did William Saroyan mean by "the old school of thought?"
- 4 In what way did the teacher behave?
- 5 Did Saroyan hope to find understanding and sympathy in Mr. Monsoon, the principal? What didn't he expect?
- 6 How did William escape punishment?
- 7 How did the conflict end?
- 8 What were William's arguments in support of his position?
- 9 Why did William feel ill at ease and angry with his uncle?

Discussing the Characters

52

The following sentences describe things that Miss Shenstone, Mr. Monsoon, the Uncle and William Saroyan said or did. How does each item characterize them?

William Saroyan

- ◆ In reference to the age of Stonehenge, William asked Miss Shenstone, "How do you know?"
- ◆ He ran out of the room when Miss Shenstone flung herself at him.
- ◆ He went to present his case to Mr. Monsoon himself.
- ◆ He ran out of the principal's office when he was told he was going to get a thrashing.
- ◆ He told Mr. Monsoon, "I came here to learn. I don't expect to be punished because I want to learn.."
- ◆ The day after his uncle talked with Mr. Monsoon and Miss Shenstone he went in and apologized to them.

You may find the following words helpful in describing William Saroyan:

aggressive	bold
brave	cowardly
curious	determined
frank	honest
impolite	insistent
intelligent	polite
proud	reasonable
straightforward	wise
disrespectful	foolish

Miss Shenstone

- ◆ After William asked the question about the age of the stones, "she flung herself" after him. When he returned, she did the same thing again.
- ◆ After the discussion with William's uncle, she agreed to look into finding out how the age of Stonehenge was determined.
- ◆ After the incident occurred, Miss Shenstone no longer looked at William in class nor asked him any questions.
- ◆ She left Longfellow School four days after the incident.

You may find the following words helpful in describing Miss Shenstone:

aggressive	cowardly
strange	ashamed
impulsive	upset
childish	incompetent
violent	compromising
frightened	wild
co-operative	

Mr. Monsoon

- ◆ When William said that he was an Armenian, the principal said, "Nobody but an Armenian would have asked a question like that."
- ◆ He told William that he must give him a thrashing.
- ◆ After the discussion with the uncle, he said that he had meant to make the comment with admiration that only an Armenian would ask a question like that.
- ◆ He suggested to the uncle that William might be transferred to another school.
- ◆ A month after the incident he left Longfellow School.

You may find the following words helpful in describing Mr. Monsoon:

cowardly	forgiving
unfair	diplomatic,
reasonable	unforgiving
threatening	strict
unreasonable	

The Uncle

- ◆ After hearing his nephew's story, he went to the school with him and talked with Mr. Monsoon and Miss Shenstone.
- ◆ He related the agreement they all had reached.
- ◆ He said that William should not be transferred to another school because he lived in this district and his friends went to this school.

You may find the following words helpful in describing the Uncle:

concerned	frank
protective	diplomatic
insistent	proud
firm	principled
supportive	

53 *Discuss these questions:*

- 1 If you were a teacher, what would you have done if William Saroyan had asked you about how the age of the stones was determined?
- 2 What would you have done if you were the principal and William Saroyan had come to you with an account of what happened in Miss Shenstone's class?
- 3 What would you have done if you were William Saroyan's uncle and he had come to you with an account of what had happened at school?
- 4 As a student would you ever ask a teacher how she/he knows that something is a fact?
- 5 Do you think a teacher should know answers to all possible questions?

Discussing the Theme of the Story

54 *What do you think Saroyan means by the "old school" and the "new school" in the following sentences?*

- "This was a fresh twist to the **old school**: the school of thought in which the teachers asked questions and the students tried to answer them."
- "Instead of trying to answer the question, Miss Shenstone forced me to demonstrate the *behaviour* of the **new school**."

55 **In the story William Saroyan gets in trouble because he breaks several accepted rules of classroom behaviour. Each of the following sentences describes something that he does which is not typically done in schools. Some of them also describe behaviour that is unusual for a teacher or principal.**

For each one, say what you think is the accepted way to behave in schools.

Example: Miss Shenstone tells William, "... just shut up and let me do the teaching of Ancient History in this class."

What rule does Miss Shenstone break?

This type of language is not considered acceptable for teachers in a classroom. They might say a similar thing in a more polite manner.

- 1 Miss Shenstone asks the class to turn to page 192 in their history books for their first lesson. William remarks that it would seem more in order to start on page one for the first lesson.
- 2 In reference to the age of Stonehenge, William asks, "How do you know?"
- 3 William presents his own case to Mr. Monsoon before Miss Shenstone goes to him.
- 4 When Mr. Monsoon says that only an Armenian would ask a question like that, William asks the principal how he knows someone else would not have asked the same question.
- 5 After the principal says that he must give William a thrashing, William asks, "For what?"
- 6 William runs out of the office when he hears he is going to get a thrashing.

56 *Choose a saying that, in your opinion, is best illustrated in the story.*

Better know nothing than half know many things.

Better untaught than ill-taught.

He who is afraid of asking, is ashamed of learning.

Though we study till old age, we cannot learn all.

57

The way the story is told reflects the author's attitude. In "Out of Order" as Saroyan is telling the story, he is also commenting on what happened.

For each of the following statements, choose the words and phrases that show Saroyan's opinion about the incident and about himself as a school student.

- "It was in Ancient History that I first astonished my class into an awareness that here was a truly original mind."
- He told Mr. Monsoon his name "as humbly as possible, although I must confess it was not easy to do."
- After the discussion with Mr. Monsoon he thinks, "I was brilliant. It's not my fault nobody else was."
- After the incident, he comments, "I felt sure the principal and the teacher would one day remember how wonderfully I behaved in this unfortunate affair, but as I've said, they didn't, and so I have had to."

58

How do you think Saroyan felt about himself as eleven-year-old? What makes you think so? Did you ever do anything when you were young that you were later very proud of?

59

Saroyan comments on his uncle's talk with Miss Shenstone and Mr. Monsoon: "... a brilliant man had come to my defence, a circumstance I could hardly be expected to enjoy."

Why do you think Saroyan did not enjoy the fact that his uncle helped him?

60

Describe several characteristics that you think are the most important to being an effective teacher. Then, explain your reason for giving the characteristics you have chosen. Finally, evaluate the teacher in the story according to these characteristics. For example, if you believe that patience is one important quality of a good teacher, do you think the teacher in this story has or does not have this quality?

61

Say what you believe are the most important characteristics of a student and then evaluate the student in this story.

62

Express your opinion about:


- how well you and most of your teachers get along;
- how school and your family help you to become a good citizen and a socially-minded person;
- how your school is preparing its students to choose an occupation in future;
- what kind of atmosphere in class (in school) can make both teaching and learning successful.

63

You no doubt have formed an opinion about how good or bad the teacher and the student in the story is. Your opinion reflects your beliefs about what makes a good teacher or student.

Speak on the topics:

- What makes a good teacher.
- What makes a good student.

-  64 a) Listen to the poem *The Road Not Taken*, then read it. Say what the poet must decide. Does the author hesitate before making a decision? How can you feel it in the poem?

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

- b) Find and read aloud the lines which answer the following questions:

- 1 What was the poet's feeling when he had to make a choice between two roads?
- 2 The poet stood long and looked at one road, but he took the other one. How does he describe the road he has taken?
- 3 How does he show that he was going to travel the first road too?
- 4 Was he sure that he would ever come back to the same place?
- 5 Why did he take the road which "was grassy and wanted wear"?

- c) What is the theme of the poem? Do you think that the two roads in the wood symbolize different roads we have to take in life? Discuss the idea.

- d) Do you think it was difficult for the poet to choose which road to take? Why do you think he preferred "the one less travelled by"? Give your reasons.

- e) Do you think the poet might regret some day that he hadn't taken the other road? Would it have made a difference if he had chosen the other way?



65

Say how choices in your own life can make a difference in the course it takes. Do you think that the choices we take in life always turn out to be the right ones? Give your reasons.

¹ to diverge [daɪ'vɜːdʒ] — расходиться
² to claim [kleɪm] — зд.: предъявлять претензии

³ to tread [tred] (trod, trodden) — ступать, шагать
⁴ hence [hens] — зд.: с этих пор