

Name: _____

Period: _____

Assignment: _____

Teacher: _____

Due Date: _____

Reading Selection: "The Jacket" by Gary Soto

Skills Focus

You will practice using these skills when you read "The Jacket" by Gary Soto:

Reading

- Activating prior knowledge

Literature

- Identifying the narrator in what you read
- Recognizing the effect of the narrator on the story

Skill Lesson: Activating Prior Knowledge

What Is It? **Activating prior knowledge** means using what you already know. You should do this every time you read. It helps you understand what you're reading about. Can you imagine reading a story about a bicycle race if you had never seen or even heard of a bicycle? It would be very hard to understand. But when you read a story about a bicycle race, the image of a bicycle might pop into your head. You have activated your prior knowledge!

Why Is It Important? Activating prior knowledge helps you understand what you read and makes reading more useful and more fun. For example, if a story takes place in New York City, you think about everything you have ever heard and learned about the city to help you understand what the author is describing.

How Do I Do It? Before you read, skim the title and text. Look at the pictures. Think about what you already know about the topic.

Practice It!

Below are some of the feelings that the narrator of "The Jacket" experiences. Think about a time that you felt these emotions. What caused those feelings? What was it like? What did you do?

- anger
- embarrassment
- sadness
- loneliness

Use It!

As you read "The Jacket," remember what you thought about the above emotions. Activate your prior knowledge about those feelings to help you understand what you read.

Before You Read Activity

Skills Preview

Key Reading Skill: Activating Prior Knowledge

Before you read the story, think about what you know about

- being a fifth or sixth grader
- getting new clothes
- feeling like an outsider

Quick Write Pick one of the topics above and, in your reading journal, write a brief paragraph about that topic. Why did you choose that topic? What do you already know about the topic? What experiences have you had that come to mind?

Key Literary Element: Narrator

The person telling a story is the **narrator**. When you read a story, you feel the hopes and disappointments with the narrator as he or she describes them. The narrator of a biography is someone other than the person being written about. The narrator of an autobiography is the author. In this selection from Gary Soto’s autobiography, Soto is the narrator. As you read, use these tips to help you learn about the narrator:

- An autobiography gives only one side of what happened—the author’s side. Think about the details that the author provides.

Do you think that being a fifth or sixth grader affected how Soto felt about his new jacket?

- Decide if you trust the narrator as a storyteller.

Does he exaggerate details? Does he seem honest or dishonest?

Get Ready to Read

Connect to the Reading

As you read “The Jacket,” think about how the narrator felt when he wore his new jacket. Compare his feelings to the way you might have felt.

Think-Pair-Share Think about clothes at your school. How are clothing trends started? If you have a dress code at school, do kids ever try to push the limits of the dress code? Pair with a classmate next to you and share your thoughts about the topic.

Build Background

“The Jacket” is about the narrator’s life as a fifth- and sixth-grader, a time when he didn’t quite fit in and was growing out of his clothes fast.

- Soto’s family is of Mexican heritage, and he grew up in California.
- Soto often draws upon experiences from his youth in his writing.



Gary Soto

Meet the Author

Gary Soto was born in Fresno, California, in 1952. His parents, although born in America, were of Mexican heritage. Soto uses his poems and stories to tell about his experiences as a boy growing up. Many of his stories focus on issues that deal with being Latino in America.

“The Jacket” by Gary Soto

My clothes have failed me. I remember the green coat that I wore in fifth and sixth grades when you either danced like a champ or pressed yourself against a greasy wall, bitter as a penny toward the happy couples. **1**

When I needed a new jacket and my mother asked what kind I wanted, I described something like bikers wear: black leather and silver studs with enough belts to hold down a small town. We were in the kitchen, steam on the windows from her cooking. She listened so long while stirring dinner that I thought she understood for sure the kind I wanted. The next day when I got home from school, I discovered draped on my bedpost a jacket the color of day-old guacamole. I threw my books on the bed and approached the jacket slowly, as if it were a stranger whose hand I had to shake. I touched the **vinyl** sleeve, the collar, and peeked at the mustard-colored lining. **2**

From the kitchen mother yelled that my jacket was in the closet. I closed the door to her voice and pulled at the rack of clothes in the closet, hoping the jacket on the bedpost wasn't for me but my mean brother. No luck. I gave up. From my bed, I stared at the jacket. I wanted to cry because it was so ugly and so big that I knew I'd have to wear it a long time. I was a small kid, thin as a young tree, and it would be years before I'd have a new one. I stared at

Practice the Skills

1. Reviewing Skills

Setting a purpose for Reading

This story is an autobiography. It's about a boy in sixth grade. What purpose could you set for reading an autobiographical story like “The Jacket”?

2. Key Reading Skill

Activating Prior Knowledge

The narrator has mentioned

- a jacket “like bikers wear,”
- “the color of day-old guacamole,”
- “mustard-colored”

Did your prior knowledge help you understand these terms or anything else in the first two paragraphs? Explain.

Vocabulary

vinyl (VY nul) *adj.* made of vinyl, which is a tough, shiny plastic

the jacket, like an enemy, thinking bad things before I took off my old jacket whose sleeves climbed halfway to my elbow. 3

I put the big jacket on.

I zipped it up and down several times, and rolled the cuffs up so they didn't cover my hands. I put my hands in the pockets and flapped the jacket like a bird's wings. I stood in front of the mirror, full face, then **profile**, and then looked over my shoulder as if someone had called me. I sat on the bed, stood against the bed, and combed my hair to see what I would look like doing something natural. I looked ugly. I threw it on my brother's bed and looked at it for a long time before I slipped it on and went out to the backyard, smiling a "thank you" to my mom as I passed her in the kitchen. With my hands in my pockets I kicked a ball against the fence, and then climbed it to sit looking into the alley. I hurled orange peels at the mouth of an open garbage can and when the peels were gone I watched the white puffs of my breath thin to nothing.

I jumped down, hands in my pockets, and in the backyard on my knees I teased my dog, Brownie, by swooping my arms while making bird calls. He jumped at me and missed.

He jumped again and again, until a tooth sunk deep, ripping an L-shaped tear on my left sleeve. I pushed Brownie away to study the tear as I would a cut on my arm. There was no blood, only a few pieces of fuzz. Dumb dog, I thought, and pushed him away hard when he tried to bite again. I got up from my knees and went to my bedroom to sit with my jacket on my lap, with the lights out.

That was the first afternoon with my new jacket. The next day I wore it to sixth grade and got a D on a math quiz. During the morning recess Frankie T., the playground

3. Key Literary Element

Narrator In the opening paragraphs you can already begin to hear the narrator's "voice." He seems disappointed. What do you think of the narrator at this point. Explain.

Vocabulary

profile (PROH fyl) *n.* a side view

terrorist, pushed me to the ground and told me to stay there until recess was over. My best friend, Steve Negrete, ate an apple while looking at me, and the girls turned away to whisper on the monkey bars. The teachers were no help: they looked my way and talked about how foolish I looked in my new jacket. I saw their heads bob with laughter, their hands half-covering their mouths. ¶

Even though it was cold, I took off the jacket during lunch and played kickball in a thin shirt, my arms feeling like Braille from goose bumps. But when I returned to class I slipped the jacket on and shivered until I was warm. I sat on my hands, heating them up, while my teeth chattered like a cup of crooked dice. Finally warm, I slid out of the jacket but a few minutes later put it back on when the fire bell rang. We paraded out into the yard where we, the sixth graders, walked past all the other grades to stand against the back fence. Everybody saw me. Although they didn't say out loud, "Man, that's ugly," I heard the buzz-buzz of gossip and even laughter that I knew was meant for me.

And so I went, in my guacamole-colored jacket. So embarrassed, so hurt, I couldn't even do my homework. I received Cs on quizzes, and forgot the state capitals and the rivers of South America, our friendly neighbor. Even the girls who had been friendly blew away like loose flowers to follow the boys in neat jackets.

I wore that thing for three years until the sleeves grew short and my forearms stuck out like necks of turtles. All during that time no love came to me—no little dark girl in a Sunday dress she wore on Monday. At lunchtime I stayed with the ugly boys who leaned against the chainlink fence and looked around with propellers of grass spinning in our mouths. We saw girls walk by alone, saw couples, hand in hand, their heads like bookends pressing air together. We

4. Key Reading Skill

Activating Prior Knowledge

Think about what a teacher's job is all about. Do you think the teachers are really talking about how the narrator looks in his jacket? Why or why not?

saw them and spun our propellers so fast our faces were blurs. **5**

I blame that jacket for those bad years. I blame my mother for her bad taste and her cheap ways. It was a sad time for the heart. With a friend I spent my sixth-grade year in a tree in the alley, waiting for something good to happen to me in that jacket, which had become the ugly brother who tagged along wherever I went. And it was about that time that I began to grow. My chest puffed up with muscle and, strangely, a few more ribs. Even my hands, those fleshy hammers, showed bravely through the cuffs, the fingers already hardening for the coming fights. But that L-shaped rip on the left sleeve got bigger, bits of stuffing coughed out from its wound after a hard day of play. I finally Scotch-taped it closed, but in rain or cold weather the tape peeled off like a scab and more stuffing fell out until that sleeve shriveled into a *palsied*¹ arm. That winter the elbows began to crack and whole chunks of green began to fall off. I showed the cracks to my mother, who always seemed to be at the stove with steamed-up glasses, and she said that there were children in Mexico who would love that jacket. I told her that this was America and yelled that Debbie, my sister, didn't have a jacket like mine. I ran outside, ready to cry, and climbed the tree by the alley to think bad thoughts and watch my breath puff white and disappear. **6**

But whole pieces still casually flew off my jacket when I played hard, read quietly, or took vicious spelling tests at school. When it became so spotted that my brother began to call me "camouflage," I flung it over the fence into the alley. Later, however, I swiped the jacket off the ground and went inside to drape it across my lap and **mope**.

I was called to dinner: steam silvered my mother's glasses as she said grace; my brother and sister with their

5. Key Literary Element

Narrator Now that you've read more of the story, what do you think of the narrator? Do you trust him? Is he honest? Does he exaggerate?

6. Key Literary Element

Narrator Can you "hear" the narrator's voice in this paragraph? Explain. What words would you use to describe the way the narrator is feeling?

1. *palsied* (PAWL zeed) means "withered by disease."

Vocabulary

mope (mohp) *v.* to be gloomy or low in spirits

heads bowed made ugly faces at their glasses of powdered milk. I gagged too, but eagerly ate big rips of buttered tortilla that held scooped-up beans. Finished, I went outside with my jacket across my arm. It was a cold sky. The faces of clouds were piled up, hurting. I started up the alley and soon slipped into my jacket, that green ugly brother who breathed over my shoulder that day and ever since.