

1 Background

Seventh Grade Seventh grade is the time when many adolescents begin experimenting with new ways of expressing themselves through their clothes, music, and hairstyles as well as through their choice of companions and activities.

2 Motivation

Use the **Vocab-o-Gram** strategy (**General Resources**, p. 13) to provide information that will allow students to make predictions about the reading. Put the following words on the board or on transparency:

<i>cute</i>	<i>embarrassed</i>
<i>homeroom</i>	<i>shame</i>
<i>scowl</i>	<i>pretending</i>
<i>lingered</i>	<i>love</i>
<i>impress</i>	

Then, give students the Vocab-o-Gram chart (**General Resources**, p. 14), and have them work with a partner or group to place the words in appropriate categories and to make predictions about the story.

Concept Connector

Tell students they will return to their predictions after they read the selection.

3 About the Selection

On the first day of seventh grade, Victor and his friend Michael try to hide their insecurities and impress the girls in their class. With his sights on Teresa, Victor signs up for French class to be near her. In that class, Victor takes a risk, impulsively implying that he knows French when he really does not. Victor's enthusiasm leads him to an embarrassing situation, but the sensitive teacher saves Victor from losing the respect of his classmates. Victor learns that teachers can be kind, that girls are approachable, and that taking a risk to fit in can pay off.

4 Literary Analysis Character

Review the details about Victor. Have students fill in these details on their graphic organizers. Next, **ask** the Literary Analysis question.

Answer: He's a planner and he's confident.

Seventh Grade

Gary Soto

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On the first day of school, Victor stood in line half an hour before he came to a wobbly card table. He was handed a packet of papers and a computer card on which he listed his one elective, French. He already spoke Spanish and English, but he thought some day he might travel to France, where it was cool; not like Fresno, where summer days reached 110 degrees in the shade. There were rivers in France and huge churches, and fair-skinned people everywhere, the way there were brown people all around Victor.

Besides, Teresa, a girl he had liked since they were in catechism classes at Saint Theresa's, was taking French, too. With any luck they would be in the same class. Teresa is going to be my girl this year, he promised himself as he left the gym full of students in their new fall clothes. She was cute. And good in math, too, Victor thought as he walked down the hall to his homeroom. He ran into his friend, Michael Torres, by the water fountain that never turned off.

They shook hands, *raza*-style, and jerked their heads at one another in a *saludo de vato*.¹ "How come you're making a face?" asked Victor.

"I ain't making a face, *ese*.² This is my face." Michael said his face had changed during the summer. He had read a *GG*

1. *raza*-style . . . *saludo de vato* (sā lōō' dō dā bā' tō) Spanish gestures of greeting between friends.

2. *ese* (es' ā) *n.* Spanish word for "man."

Vocabulary Builder

elective (ē lek' tiv)
n. optional course

Literary Analysis

Character What can you tell about Victor based on his thoughts in this paragraph?

Vocabulary Development

Think-Aloud: Context

Direct students' attention to the word *catechism* on this page. Using a think-aloud process, model how to use context to infer the meaning of an unknown word. Say to students:

I'm going to think aloud to show you how I would figure out the meaning of *catechism* from its context.

In this sentence, catechism is described as a type of class that Victor and Teresa took together. They took the class at Saint Theresa's, which is either a church or a

school. It is possible that Saint Theresa's is another school, but if it is a church, then catechism is probably a class that is related to church teachings. There are no other clues in this paragraph, so I should double-check my guess in the dictionary. According to the dictionary, *catechism* is "a series of questions and answers that teach the principles of religion." So a catechism class is one in which students learn about a particular religion.

5 Critical Thinking Compare

- Tell students that authors often include characters in their stories who provide contrast to the main character. They usually do this in order to highlight a particular characteristic of the main character.
- After students read the bracketed passage, **ask** them how Victor and Michael are similar and different.
- **Possible response:** Both Victor and Michael want girls to like them. Michael has decided that scowling is the way to get girls' attention. Unlike Michael, Victor is already interested in one particular girl, Teresa. Michael's plan, to attract girls by scowling, is funny and seems less likely to succeed than Victor's plan of taking a class in order to increase his chances that he will see Theresa often.

6 Reading Check

Answer: Victor decides to study French because he would like to visit France one day, because he already speaks English and Spanish, and because a girl he likes is taking French.

magazine that his older brother had borrowed from the Book Mobile and noticed that the male models all had the same look on their faces. They would stand, one arm around a beautiful woman, and *scowl*. They would sit at a pool, their rippled stomachs dark with shadow, and *scowl*. They would sit at dinner tables, cool drinks in their hands, and *scowl*.

"I think it works," Michael said. He scowled and let his upper lip quiver. His teeth showed along with the ferocity of his soul. "Belinda Reyes walked by a while ago and looked at me," he said.

Victor didn't say anything, though he thought his friend looked pretty strange. They talked about recent movies, baseball, their parents, and the horrors of picking grapes in order to buy their fall clothes. Picking grapes was like living in Siberia,³ except hot and more boring.

"What classes are you taking?" Michael said, scowling.

"French. How 'bout you?"

"Spanish. I ain't so good at it, even if I'm Mexican."

"I'm not either, but I'm better at it than math, that's for sure."

A tinny, three-beat bell propelled students to their homerooms. The two friends socked each other in the arm and went their ways, Victor thinking, man, that's weird. Michael thinks making a face makes him handsome.

On the way to his homeroom, Victor tried a scowl. He felt foolish, until out of the corner of his eye he saw a girl looking at him. Umm, he thought, maybe it does work. He scowled with greater conviction.

In homeroom, roll was taken, emergency cards were passed out, and they were given a bulletin to take home to their parents. The principal, Mr. Belton, spoke over the crackling loudspeaker, welcoming the students to a new year, new experiences, and new friendships. The students squirmed in their chairs and ignored him. They were anxious to go to first period. Victor sat calmly, thinking of Teresa, who sat two rows away, reading a paperback novel. This would be his lucky year. She was in his homeroom, and would probably be in his English and math classes. And, of course, French.

The bell rang for first period, and the students herded noisily through the door. Only Teresa lingered, talking with the homeroom teacher.

Vocabulary Builder

scowl (skəʊl) v. make an unpleasant expression by contracting the eyebrows and lowering the corners of the mouth

Vocabulary Builder

conviction (kən vɪk'ʃən) n. belief

6 Reading Check

Why does Victor choose to study French?

3. **Siberia** (sɪ bɪr'ē ə) n. region in northern Asia known for its harsh winters.

Differentiated

Instruction

Solutions for All Learners

Reading Support

Have students complete the **Preview** and **Build Skills** pages for "Seventh Grade" in the appropriate versions of the **Reader's Notebooks**.

Reader's Notebook [L3]

Reader's Notebook: Adapted Version [L1, L2]

Reader's Notebook: English Learner's Version [EL]

Accessibility at a Glance

Use this information to guide your teaching of "Seventh Grade."

Context	Contemporary urban United States
Language	Short sentences with few embedded phrases or clauses
Concept Level	More accessible (young adults fitting in)
Literary Merit	Young Adult, high interest, popular YA writer
Lexile	740

7 Literary Analysis Character

- After students read the bracketed passage, remind them that they can use their own experience, along with story details, to understand how a character is feeling. **Ask** students how they think someone is feeling when they blush. **Possible responses:** Embarrassed, self-conscious, nervous.
- **Ask** students to summarize how they know that Victor likes Teresa. **Answer:** The narrator says in the first paragraph that Victor likes her. Victor's thoughts reveal that he is taking French to be in the same class with her.
- **Ask** the first Literary Analysis question. **Answer:** Victor is embarrassed. He wants to impress Theresa, but thinks he said something stupid because he was so nervous.

8 Literary Analysis Character

- After students read the second bracketed passage on p. 252, **ask** how Victor feels about math. **Answer:** It is his weakest subject.
- Remind students that characters' actions are often closely tied to their feelings. Then **ask** students the second Literary Analysis question. **Answer:** Victor deals with subjects that are difficult by sitting in the back of the room and hoping he will not be called on.
- Tell students to use these details to fill in their graphic organizers comparing characters.

9 Critical Viewing

Possible response: The girls in the photograph are smiling and happy, demonstrating a cheerful mood. The students in the story are described as being in a sunny mood on the first day of school.

"So you think I should talk to Mrs. Gaines?" she asked the teacher. "She would know about ballet?"

"She would be a good bet," the teacher said. Then added, "Or the gym teacher, Mrs. Garza."

Victor lingered, keeping his head down and staring at his desk. He wanted to leave when she did so he could bump into her and say something clever.

7 He watched her on the sly. As she turned to leave, he stood up and hurried to the door, where he managed to catch her eye. She smiled and said, "Hi, Victor."

He smiled back and said, "Yeah, that's me." His brown face blushed. Why hadn't he said, "Hi, Teresa," or "How was your summer?" or something nice?

As Teresa walked down the hall, Victor walked the other way, looking back, admiring how gracefully she walked, one foot in front of the other. So much for being in the same class, he thought. As he trudged to English, he practiced scowling.

In English they reviewed the parts of speech. Mr. Lucas, a portly man, waddled down the aisle, asking, "What is a noun?"

"A person, place, or thing," said the class in unison.

"Yes, now somebody give me an example of a person—you, Victor Rodriguez."

"Teresa," Victor said automatically. Some of the girls giggled. They knew he had a crush on Teresa. He felt himself blushing again.

"Correct," Mr. Lucas said. "Now provide me with a place."

Mr. Lucas called on a freckled kid who answered, "Teresa's house with a kitchen full of big brothers."

8 After English, Victor had math, his weakest subject. He sat in the back by the window, hoping that he would not be called on. Victor understood most of the problems, but some of the stuff looked like the teacher made it up as she went along. It was confusing, like the inside of a watch.

Literary Analysis Character What does Victor's blush say about him?

Literary Analysis Character How does Victor deal with subjects that are difficult for him?

9 **Critical Viewing** How do the expressions of these girls compare with the descriptions of the moods of the students in the story? **[Compare and Contrast]**

Vocabulary Development

Vivid Language

Tell students that one of Gary Soto's strengths as a writer is his efficient use of vivid language to describe a character clearly. Even a minor character who appears once in the story comes to life because the author has found a vivid adjective or verb to help readers imagine how he or she looks or acts. Invite students to go through the story to find words and phrases that Gary Soto uses to describe his characters so vividly. Some examples to get students started include: "Teresa walks gracefully"; "the

teacher calls on a freckled kid"; "Mr. Lucas is a portly man who waddled."

After students collect all their words and phrases, have them break down the vivid language into categories. For example, are most of the words about the characters' appearance or the way they act? Challenge students to work in pairs or small groups, and to make a generalization about Soto's use of descriptive vocabulary.

10 Literary Analysis

Character

- After students read the bracketed passage on p. 253, **ask** them why they think Victor is pretending to study and what this action reveals about him.
Possible response: He wants to be near Theresa, but doesn't want her to know that. He doesn't know how to approach her.
- **Ask** the Literary Analysis question.
Possible response: sneaky, funny, awkward
- Tell students to use these details to fill in their graphic organizers comparing characters.

11 Reading Check

Answer: Victor is thinking about finding Teresa and attempting to get her attention.

After math he had a fifteen-minute break, then social studies, and, finally, lunch. He bought a tuna casserole with buttered rolls, some fruit cocktail, and milk. He sat with Michael, who practiced scowling between bites.

Girls walked by and looked at him.

"See what I mean, Vic?" Michael scowled. "They love it."

"Yeah, I guess so."

They ate slowly, Victor scanning the horizon for a glimpse of Teresa. He didn't see her. She must have brought lunch, he thought, and is eating outside. Victor scraped his plate and left Michael, who was busy scowling at a girl two tables away.

The small, triangle-shaped campus bustled with students talking about their new classes. Everyone was in a sunny mood. Victor hurried to the bag lunch area, where he sat down and opened his math book. He moved his lips as if he were reading, but his mind was somewhere else. He raised his eyes slowly and looked around. No Teresa.

10 He lowered his eyes, pretending to study, then looked slowly to the left. No Teresa. He turned a page in the book and stared at some math problems that scared him because he knew he would have to do them eventually. He looked to the right. Still no sign of her. He stretched out lazily in an attempt to disguise his snooping.

Then he saw her. She was sitting with a girlfriend under a plum tree. Victor moved to a table near her and daydreamed about taking her to a movie. When the bell sounded, Teresa looked up, and their eyes met. She smiled sweetly and gathered her books. Her next class was French, same as Victor's.

They were among the last students to arrive in class, so all the good desks in the back had already been taken. Victor was forced to sit near the front, a few desks away from Teresa, while Mr. Bueller wrote French words on the chalkboard. The bell rang, and Mr. Bueller wiped his hands, turned to the class, and said, "*Bonjour*."⁴

"*Bonjour*," braved a few students.

"*Bonjour*," Victor whispered. He wondered if Teresa heard him. Mr. Bueller said that if the students studied hard, at the end of the year they could go to France and be understood by the populace.

One kid raised his hand and asked, "What's 'populace'?"

"The people, the people of France."

Literary Analysis

Character Describe Victor's actions here in one or two words.

11 Reading Check

Who or what is Victor thinking of during lunch?

4. **Bonjour** (bōn zhōōr') French for "Hello"; "Good day."

Differentiated

Instruction

Solutions for All Learners

Strategy for Less Proficient Readers

Tell students that they can increase their understanding of a story by trying to understand each character. To help students focus on understanding the characters, provide copies of the **Cluster Diagram**, p. 229 of *Graphic Organizer Transparencies*. Model how to use the diagram to list elements of Victor's character. In their diagrams, students might include such things as Victor's thoughts, words, and actions. After they finish their diagrams, instruct them to write a short paragraph describing Victor's character.

Enrichment for Advanced Readers

Explain to students that the theme of a work is its main idea or concept. Guide them to see that one theme of "Seventh Grade" is the quest of teenagers to fit in. Have students write a one-page essay describing how Victor and Michael try to fit in. In their essays, students should note how Victor and Michael reflect the actions of teenagers they know or have seen. Encourage students to include their opinions of whether Victor and Michael look for or find positive ways to fit in.

12 Literature in Context

Vocabulary Connection

- Ask a volunteer to read the **Literature in Context** feature. If students are not familiar with the terms, have them check the footnotes that appear on p. 250. If you have Spanish speakers in your class, they may provide further insight.
- Lead the class in a discussion of how students feel when they read stories or nonfiction articles that contain unfamiliar words and phrases from other languages. Students may suggest that they are interested in learning words from other languages. Others may feel impatient at having to look up new words.
- Invite students to think of other words that originated in Spanish that are used frequently in English. Make a list of the words on the board.
- If time allows, ask students to think of words from other languages as well that have made their way into English. Challenge students to think of a generalization about the words they have gathered. For example, do most of the words in the list seem to be related to food or leisure activities?

Connect to the Literature Soto's use of Spanish helps readers "hear" the characters speak. It reminds readers that the characters share the bond of speaking two languages.

13 Critical Thinking Analyze

- After students read p. 254, have them stop and **recall** what has happened to Victor.
Answer: Victor tells his teacher he speaks French, because he wants to impress Teresa, but when the teacher speaks to him in French, Victor can only make up nonsense phrases.
- **Ask** students to explain Victor's motivation.
Answer: Victor is so eager to impress Teresa that he does not stop to think that he might have to say something in French.

Mr. Bueller asked if anyone knew French. Victor raised his hand, wanting to impress Teresa. The teacher beamed and said, "*Très bien. Parlez-vous français?*"⁵

Victor didn't know what to say. The teacher wet his lips and asked something else in French. The room grew silent. Victor felt all eyes staring at him. He tried to bluff his way out by making noises that sounded French.

"La me vave me con le grandma," he said uncertainly.

Mr. Bueller, wrinkling his face in curiosity, asked him to speak up.

Great rosebushes of red bloomed on Victor's cheeks. A river of nervous sweat ran down his palms. He felt awful. Teresa sat a few desks away, no doubt thinking he was a fool. Without looking at Mr. Bueller, Victor mumbled, "Frenchie oh weve gee in September."

Mr. Bueller asked Victor to repeat what he had said.

"Frenchie oh weve gee in September," Victor repeated.

Mr. Bueller understood that the boy didn't know French and turned away. He walked to the blackboard and pointed to the words on the board with his steel-edged ruler.

"*Le bateau*," he sang.

"*Le bateau*," the students repeated.

"*Le bateau est sur l'eau*,"⁶ he sang.

"*Le bateau est sur l'eau*."

13 Victor was too weak from failure to join the class. He stared at the board and wished he had taken Spanish, not French. Better yet, he wished he could start his life over. He had never been so embarrassed. He bit his thumb until he tore off a sliver of skin.

The bell sounded for fifth period, and Victor shot out of the room, avoiding the stares of the other kids, but had to return for his math book. He looked sheepishly at the teacher, who was erasing the board, then widened his eyes in terror at

5. **Très bien. Parlez-vous français?** (trä byan pär lä voo' från sä) French for "Very well. Do you speak French?"

6. **Le bateau est sur l'eau** (lə bä tö' ä soor lö) French for "The boat is on the water."

Literature in Context

Vocabulary Connection

New English Words At the beginning of the story, Victor and Michael shake hands *raza-style* and give each other a *saludo de vato*. These Spanish terms may be unfamiliar to many English speakers.

However, the following words originated in Spanish and are now very familiar in English.

tortilla: a thin, flat, round cake made of cornmeal or flour and cooked on a griddle

fiesta: a celebration or holiday

siesta: a brief nap or rest taken after the noon meal

Connect to the Literature

How does Soto use Spanish to help him develop characters in the story?

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary Builder Reinforcement

Students will benefit from additional examples and practice with the Vocabulary Builder words. Reinforce their comprehension with "show-you-know" sentences. The first part of the sentence uses the vocabulary word in an appropriate context. The second part of the sentence—the "show-you-know" part—clarifies the first. Model the strategy with this example using the Vocabulary Builder word *elective*:

I decided to sign up for drama as my elective course; even though I did not have to take it, I am interested in the theater.

Then give students sentence prompts like this one, and coach them in creating the clarification part.

As she walked along the corridor, the woman *scowled* at the children who were running; _____.

Sample answer: she disapproved of running in the halls and showed it with her frowning face.

Teresa who stood in front of him. “I didn’t know you knew French,” she said. “That was good.”

Mr. Bueller looked at Victor, and Victor looked back. Oh please, don’t say anything, Victor pleaded with his eyes. I’ll wash your car, mow your lawn, walk your dog—anything! I’ll be your best student and I’ll clean your erasers after school.

Mr. Bueller shuffled through the papers on his desk. He smiled and hummed as he sat down to work. He remembered his college years when he dated a girlfriend in borrowed cars. She thought he was rich because each time he picked her up he had a different car. It was fun until he had spent all his money on her and had to write home to his parents because he was broke.

Victor couldn’t stand to look at Teresa. He was sweaty with shame. “Yeah, well, I picked up a few things from movies and books and stuff like that.” They left the class together. Teresa asked him if he would help her with her French.

“Sure, anytime,” Victor said.

“I won’t be bothering you, will I?”

“Oh no, I like being bothered.”

“*Bonjour*,” Teresa said, leaving him outside her next class. She smiled and pushed wisps of hair from her face.

“Yeah, right, *bonjour*,” Victor said. He turned and headed to his class. The rose-bushes of shame on his face became bouquets of love. Teresa is a great girl, he thought. And Mr. Bueller is a good guy.

He raced to metal shop. After metal shop there was biology, and after biology a long sprint to the public library, where he checked out three French textbooks.

He was going to like seventh grade.

Literary Analysis Character Based on his actions in this paragraph, describe one of Mr. Bueller’s character traits.

14 Literary Analysis Character

- Invite a volunteer to read aloud the bracketed passage on p. 257 **Ask** students to recall what Mr. Bueller thinks and does in the passage. **Answer:** He shuffles his papers and remembers the things he did when he was young and trying to impress a girl he liked.
- Next, **ask** the Literary Analysis question on the page. **Possible response:** Mr. Bueller is kind and thoughtful.
- Invite students to think of other ways Mr. Bueller could have reacted to Victor. **Ask** students why he didn’t do those things. **Possible response:** Mr. Bueller could have embarrassed Victor or made him look foolish. Because Mr. Bueller can identify with Victor, he lets the moment pass.

Concept Connector

Have students return to their Vocab-o-Grams. Ask them to gauge how well they were able to predict what happened in the story using the vocabulary words. Remind students that effective readers often revise their predictions as they read and as more information becomes available.

ASSESS

Answers

1. Students might say that Victor’s actions could impress Teresa, but that Teresa may find out the truth eventually and then think badly of him. Students might advise Victor to be himself.
2. (a) He thinks it will impress the girls. (b) Both characters pretend to be something they are not in order to impress girls.
3. (a) He thinks she is pretty and smart. (b) He describes her looks, her personality, and her mathematical ability.
4. (a) Victor learns that he needs to be careful about pretending, because he came so close to getting caught. (b) **Possible response:** It is important to be yourself, because pretending to be someone else can cause trouble.

Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** What advice would you give Victor about the way he tries to impress Teresa?
2. (a) **Recall:** Why does Michael scowl? (b) **Compare and Contrast:** What is similar about Michael’s scowling and Victor’s pretending to speak French?
3. (a) **Infer:** How does Victor view Teresa? (b) **Support:** What examples from the story indicate his feelings?
4. (a) **Analyze:** What does Victor probably learn from his experiences? (b) **Apply:** How can you apply this lesson to your own life?

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Differentiated Instruction

Solutions for All Learners

Strategy for Special Needs Students

Have students work in pairs to reread the selection. Tell them to follow the story as they listen to the **Listening to Literature Audio CD**. When students have finished, ask the pairs to discuss what they think the story says about fitting in. Help students identify how the light-hearted tone and the embarrassing incidents lead to the message that fitting in is not really worth the price of lying or pretending.

Strategy for Less Proficient Readers

Help students identify the main events in the selection by focusing on the actions of the main character. Explain that they must be able to tell the difference between the main events and the minor developments in the story. Tell them that the characters’ actions move the plot along and contribute to the rising action of the story. Point out that minor events may be funny or interesting, but do not contribute to moving the plot forward. Encourage students to think about what Victor does so they can order the main events in a flowchart or storyboard.