



The Personal Narrative Assignment 4

- Read the second half of James Thurber, *University Days* (second half), chapters 6-end. Answer the study guide questions (below).
- Complete your narrative essay.
- Be sure to write a journal entry on one of the topics talked about in the study guide, or a recent experience. It does not have to be long!
- Memorize stanza 1 of John Keats' poem "The Grasshopper and Cricket." Also, remember some of the technical terms that we talked about: *sonnet*, *enjambment*, and *metaphor*. Also, remember what "The poetry of earth is never dead" means.
- Above is a picture of Columbus, Ohio, where Thurber was born and grew up.

Long Range Assignments

- Think about a person you would like to know more about or whose story you think should be known. It could be anyone *over 50*—a relative, a friend of the family's, a neighbor, etc. (It has to be someone you know!) You will be writing a biography of this person, due in March. On the last Friday of October, tell me the subject you have chosen.
- The book report will be due the third Friday in January. The book report format sheet is online.

The Dog that Bit People
From *My Life and Hard Times*
By James Thurber

Multiple Choice

1. Which of the following words most nearly defines the word *humor* as it is used in paragraph 4, sentence 2?
 - a) funniness
 - b) mood
 - c) amusement
 - d) situation
 - e) personality
2. Why did the mother apparently send out candy at Christmas?
 - a) for appeasement
 - b) for charity
 - c) to ingratiate
 - d) to advertise
 - e) for business purposes
3. Which of the following is apparently not true of the mother in the narrative?
 - a) She defends Muggs when he bites people even though the dog is clearly vicious.
 - b) She is superstitious and believes in astrology.
 - c) She knows Latin.
 - d) She does not like mice.
 - e) She has a neighbor named Mrs. Detweiler.
4. Which of the following does not make Muggs seem more human than animal?
 - a) Muggs is described as being “choleric” and irritable in the morning.
 - b) Muggs is described as being afraid of electrical storms.
 - c) The mother wanted a tombstone and an inscription for Muggs.
 - d) Muggs bit people.
 - e) Muggs was sorry, the mother said, after he bit people.
5. What was the advantage of being a member of the family owning Muggs?
 - a) Muggs was more affectionate toward family members.
 - b) Muggs was a good guard dog.
 - c) A family member was not bitten as often.
 - d) The family gained positive recognition from their neighbors.
 - e) The family was more cheerful having a dog in the house.
6. Thurber attributes Muggs’ fear of electrical storms to _____.
 - a) dreams that Muggs had had.
 - b) the mailman
 - c) Muggs’ fright when the mantelpiece fell.

- d) all of the above
 - e) none of the above
7. Why would the mother not tie Muggs up to stop him from biting people?
- a) She thought it was inhumane.
 - b) Muggs was extremely embarrassed being tied up.
 - c) Muggs would not eat.
 - d) both a and b
 - e) both b and c
8. Why was Uncle Horatio angry when he discovered that the family fed Muggs on a table?
- a) The family could not afford to feed a dog human food.
 - b) Muggs did not have any table manners.
 - c) Uncle Horatio thought that it was inappropriate for a dog to be fed at the table and foolish to do it out of fear.
 - d) The dog did not wait for the others to sit at the table before he started eating.
 - e) Uncle Horatio did not like dogs.
9. What is the best word to describe the mother's behavior toward Muggs?
- a) strict
 - b) rational
 - c) indulgent
 - d) vindictive
 - e) choleric
10. Why was the mother pleased with the inscription on Muggs' "tomb"?
- a) She thought that the meaning of the phrase *Cave Canem* was appropriate for a dog who had bitten so many people.
 - b) She was well versed in the ancient languages and enjoyed the Latin writers.
 - c) She liked the dignity that the Latin inscription lent to the dog's "tomb."
 - d) She was really glad that Muggs was dead.
 - e) Her sons told her that the epitaph meant "Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Thurber describes his family dog Muggs as if he were a person. In what ways was Muggs treated as a human being? How does Thurber emphasize the ridiculousness of this situation? Do you think such a situation is common among pet owners?
2. What do you think is so funny about this essay? Choose some particular parts of the essay and be ready to discuss how Thurber achieves humor.

Writing Focus *Humor in Writing*

One of the most difficult things to do in writing is make a reader laugh. Some of the greatest writers in the English language— Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Jonathan Swift and Chaucer—owe some of their success to this unique ability. These writers achieved humor in their writing through *satire*. Satire involves the use of hyperbole¹ to show the absolute irrationality, ridiculousness, or hypocrisy of human behavior. Mark Twain takes a jab at false religion in his satirical classic *Huckleberry Finn*. The caretakers of Huck, widow Douglas and Miss Watson, try very hard to “civilize” the backwoods boy by making him learn table manners, mannerly dress and the Bible. However, by the end of the book the reader sees through the irrational and hypocritical ways of the civilized world, such as the institution of slavery, that it is the “civilized world,” not Huck, that needs reform. The most famous scene in satirical literature is found in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* in which the starving orphan boy asks for more thin gruel and the cook cringes back in absolute astonishment. The farcical exaggeration of the cook’s reaction serves to point out the insensibility of the powers-that-be regarding the plight of the poor and the cruelty of the Poor Laws in England.

James Thurber’s satire “The Dog That Bit People” is less vicious perhaps, but no less funny. In it he shows the irrationality of people and their pets. Unlike Twain and Dickens, who wrote about more serious human offenses, Thurber “created”² characters whose foibles are more ridiculous than noxious. This allows the reader more room to laugh with impunity. Reread Thurber’s narrative and consider its humorous and satirical effect.

University Days By James Thurber From My Life and Hard Times

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What word would best describe the botany professor’s attitude toward the narrator?
 - a) exasperated
 - b) sympathetic
 - c) confused
 - d) cheerful
 - e) mournful

2. Which of the following words best describes Thurber’s tone in the essay?

¹ **hyperbole** Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration. When a mother tells her son, “I told you a million times to clean your room,” she is using hyperbole. Hyperbole, however, is not an attempt to distort the truth; it is a figure of speech in which the reader is aware of the exaggeration.

² Thurber’s autobiography is a curious mixture of fact and fiction; some of the people he talks about in his essays are fictional.

- a) ironic
 - b) dark
 - c) droll
 - d) nostalgic
 - e) bitter
3. The narrator says that some believed there was “German money” behind the drilling of soldiers at Ohio State. They said this because ____.
- a) the professors at Ohio State University were known to support the Germans
 - b) the soldiers were using outdated methods.
 - c) the Germans supported higher education
 - d) they were most likely German immigrants and faced possible deportation if they expressed their beliefs
 - e) none of the above
4. The author present himself as ____.
- a) a bohemian artist
 - b) a humorist
 - c) a troublemaker
 - d) an incompetent scholar
 - e) a literary genius
5. The author writes about the fly to ____.
- a) add interesting detail about the conference with General Littleton
 - b) reveal his own stubborn ways
 - c) satirize a military man’s ways
 - d) show his nervousness
 - e) none of the above