

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

“The Ransom of Red Chief” by O. Henry

Author Background:

Birth and death dates: 1862-1910

Type of literature: Short stories which present ordinary life, using coincidence and surprise

Facts about life: American who was once convicted of embezzlement (to illegally take or use money from others), he began writing in prison

Vocabulary from the Story:

Maypole—a pole decorated with flowers and ribbons for May Day

Rural—relating to the country or farmlands

Lackadaisical—lethargic, without excitement

Diatribes—a long-winded criticism

Emit—to give off

Reconnoiter—to inspect or observe

Peremptory—to act first

Surreptitiously—secretly, acting in a stealthy way

Martyr—a person who is willing to suffer death on behalf of a cause

Calliope—a harsh-sounding steam organ

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why do Sam and Bill need money?
2. Who do they choose to kidnap? Why do they choose this particular person?
3. Where do they hide the boy after they kidnap him?
4. Give an example of Red Chief's behavior that surprises Sam and Bill.
5. What is the father's reaction to the ransom note?

Foreshadowing

To **foreshadow** means to give clues or hints to suggest events that will happen later in the story.

Give one example from the story where O. Henry uses foreshadowing.



Irony

Irony is when what happens is different, or even the opposite, of what is expected to occur. Often authors use irony to connect to, or emphasize, the theme.

Examples of irony:

- wearing snow boots in 90 degree weather
- learning French to go to a Spanish-speaking country
- buying the best steak for a person who is a vegetarian
- having 10,000 spoons when all you need is a knife

1. Describe something ironic that has happened to you or someone you know.

2. Give an example of irony in “The Ransom of Red Chief.”

3. Write an ironic ending to the following story (up to 3 sentences):

Lydia had math A period and there was a test today! Math class was always easy for Lydia; it was in math that she received the best grades on her report cards. BUT, for today’s test the students needed to know so many formulas and because of this, Lydia studied for the past five nights. She walked into the test and..... _____
