



Sharon Creech's
Fishing in the Air

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Missy Andrews



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FISHING IN THE AIR



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QUICK CARD



<i>Reference</i>	<i>Fishing in the Air</i> by Sharon Creech ISBN-10: 1591122244 ISBN-13: 978-1591122241
<i>Plot</i>	On a fishing trip, a father and his son fish not only for dinner, but also for lost fragments of the past.
<i>Setting</i>	An early morning fishing trip for a father and son. The country, the river, the sky, childhood.
<i>Characters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The boy and his father (protagonists)• The father's father• Time (the antagonist): "Where is that father/ that boy?"
<i>Conflict</i>	Man vs. Nature: The father, wondering at the passage of time, searches his memory to find his past.
<i>Theme</i>	The passage of time. Memory and family traditions create continuity between generations, overcoming the obstacles of time and aging. The bonds between father and son.
<i>Literary Devices</i>	Imagery Motif/Metaphor – Fishing Similes Alliteration Sensory Language

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



In what country or region does the story happen? (1a) Do you long to climb into the pages of the book to live in its world, or does it repel you? Why? (1f)

The story takes place on a father and son fishing trip. It begins before dawn in the early morning and spans a lazy, lovely day. The scene is idyllic. The sky is full of white, puffy clouds. The air is drenched in sunshine. The smell of the river and the sounds of nature surround the pair. The warmth of the place and the relationship the characters share draw readers into their world. The place could be anywhere; its beauty makes it inviting by itself. Still it's the relationship between the characters that makes it singularly attractive.

Is there anything symbolic or allegorical about the place where the story happens? (1i) Is the setting of the story important because of historical events which may have taken place there? How does this link help you understand the themes of the story? (1j)

While there's no direct significance of the place, the setting and event reminds the father of childhood fishing trips with his own dad. This similarity creates a continuity that transcends temporal, physical boundaries between the past and the present, pointing at thematic elements the story will proceed to flesh out.

When does this story happen? (2)

The story covers a single summer day. However, it's set in the spring of the boy's life and the fall of the father's.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



Who is the story about? (3)

The protagonist of the story (who is also the narrator) is a young boy. He is carefree and content. In contrast to the father, he has no real responsibilities. He's the child in the relationship, enjoying being loved and cared for by a good father.

Is the character a member of any particular religious or social group? If so, what do you know about this group? What motivates this group? What do its members feel to be important? (3l)

Although he doesn't know it, as a member of his father's family, the boy belongs to a special group of people – his ancestors. He inherits from them not only physical traits, but also character traits, values, and traditions. It seems from the text that family relationships and time together are especially important to these people.

What does the protagonist think is the most important thing in life? How do you know this? Does the protagonist say this out loud, or do his thoughts and actions give him away? (3m)

The character is really too young to have a developed opinion about the weighty issues of life, but he's learning with every cast of his line the importance of family relationships and time shared together.

Who else is the story about? (4)

The father is equally important in this story. As the boy "fishes" for a story, the father "bites" and begins remembering his own childhood aloud. His elusive memories create conflict, calling up the lost past. "Where is that father and that boy?" the father pines.

The subtlety of this conflict can make it difficult to identify. The past times the father recalls make him melancholy, casting shadows in an otherwise sunny scene. The father is the son's world. When clouds gather on his brow, the son's sky darkens. Time, then, is a silent antagonist in this story. Its quiet progress brings change to us and to others. Most often felt when it runs out, time threatens the continuity of family relationships with its stealthy approach.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



What does the protagonist want? (5)

The son wants to share his father's memories and pursuits. He wants to "catch" something.

Does he attempt to overcome something – a physical impediment, or an emotional handicap? (5b)

As the son fishes, his father's thoughts are stirred and he ponders his lost and distant past.

Does he strive to overcome a physical obstacle outside of himself (An ocean, for example, like Christopher Columbus, or nature generally, like a Jack London character)? (5c)

The father strives against Time and Nature. The son remains childishly unaware.

Does the protagonist try to capture an object? (5d)

The father's object is peace and perspective.

Do his objectives or goals change throughout the story? How?Why? (5f)

The father's object at the start of the story is a father-son friendship. Yet as his present experience evokes nostalgic memories, he wrestles with his melancholy.

Why can't he have it? (6) What kind of conflict drives this story forward? (6h)

The conflict is a Man vs. Nature struggle.

What happens in the story? (8)

- The father and son get up early and hop in the car for a fishing trip.
- The boy enjoys the early morning hours before the sun rises, and wonders at the sights and sounds around him.
- Arriving at the river, sun shining gloriously, the two find their spot and begin to fish.
- While the father fishes, the son casts his hookless bobber into the air again and again.

- The surroundings and activity remind the father of his boyhood fishing trips with his own father.

How is the main problem solved? (9) What events form the highest point or climax of the story's tension? Are they circumstantial events, or emotional ones? Is the climax a spiritual or physical one? (9d)

The climax of the story occurs as the father wonders where that remembered boy and father went. His son, however, "catches" what he's fishing for in an instant of childish literalism:

"Where is that father and that son?" "Right here," I said."

The boy "finds" the lost pair in himself and his dad. For the father, the son's words produce an epiphany. He sees his past in his present experience and realizes that his father lives on in him, in a sense. In this way, the father discovers the power of shared traditions to create continuity between generations.

How does the story end? (10)

The story comes full circle as the two embrace and trek home with their "catch," content with the world and each other, connected with their ancestors, and shored up by their shared experience.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



What is the main idea of the story? (13)

In Sharon Creech’s poetic children’s story, *Fishing In the Air*, a young boy accompanies his father on an early morning fishing trip. Leaving the light-lined city streets for the open spaces of the country, the two revel in the magical pleasures of nature which are heightened all the more by the boy’s active imagination. Imagery abounds as the boy perceives moons in lamplight, rows of soldiers at attention in the tall pines that line the road, and angelic choirs in the warbling of birds.

While the father fishes, the boy casts his hookless fishing line high into the air and plies his father with questions. These and the lazy river evoke from the father bright memories of the past that swim before him elusively. Still the boy baits his father, and still the ephemeral images waver as the father is swept away by nostalgia and begins asking his own questions. “Where is that father, and where is that boy?” he ponders.

As the boy casts one final time, he “catches it all” – he sees in the moment his own scene, and in his scene, echoes of his father’s childhood. “Right here,” he responds.

The father learns the importance of communion and fellowship between generations. The story suggests that a “good life” is one achieved, in part, by giving to one’s children what was given to oneself. It suggests that a good life involves sharing family traditions and time with children, creating memories, and building relationships that rob time of its power to rob us.

Creech’s beautiful imagery and illustrator Chris Raschka’s imaginative art together evoke the deep magic of family traditions and their mystical ability to marry the past and the present. Her story strikes a universal chord in its exploration of the abstract nature of time and the enduring power of family relationships. Her fishing motif powerfully baits readers to share their past with someone in their present for the dual purpose of nurturing both others and self.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE



Does the author use the sounds of our language to create interest in his story? (14)

Alliteration (14e)

“damp dirt”

“bubbles of breeze and birds”

“red roof and rolling green fields with red flowers waving... a river rippling”

Does the author use descriptions and comparisons to create pictures in the reader's mind? (16)

Imagery

“The grass left wet marks on our shoes. In the backyard, under stones, we dug up crawly worms and laid them in a can with lumps of damp dirt.”

”There were green fields around it, rolling green fields with bright red flowers here and there like floating rubies...”

Similes (16d)

“Look at those street lamps...glowing like tiny moons all in a row.”

“Those trees...don't they look like tall green soldiers standing at attention?”

“...birds singing their songs like little angels”

Red flowers are like floating rubies

Metaphor (16h)

lamps became moons

trees became soldiers

“bubbles of breeze”

“birds became ...little angels singing their songs”

By extension and implication, the “air” the boy fishes in is the father's past, time, memories or thoughts. They are ephemeral, abstract, and fleeting.

How does this help create mood for the story? (16j)

The use of metaphors stirs the imagination of the child in the story to create a sense of wonder and magic. In addition, metaphors and imagery stir the father's senses so as to recall memories from his youth, evoking the past.

Personification (16e, f)

trees become soldiers

birds speak with voices of angels

Does the author use the character and events in his story to communicate a theme that goes beyond them in some way? (17)

Irony (17d)

The boy's words, "Here they are..." are ironic; he refers to himself and his father, yet his father sees in them the other boy and father of his memory. The father recognizes that his own father has reproduced himself in him.

Symbolism (17h, i, m)

The boy, the father, and the fishing trip all represent and recall another boy, another father, and another fishing trip from long ago in the father's own childhood.

The fishing trip/special time symbolizes the father's past. This becomes a motif in the story.

The "air" the child fishes in represents time and memory.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT



Who is the author? (18)

Author Sharon Creech was born in Ohio in 1945 and was one of five children. She has taught English and composition at a high school boarding school called The American School in Switzerland. She is married to Lyle Rigg, headmaster of the Penington School in New Jersey. Together they have two children, Rob and Karin. Mrs. Creech has written numerous books, two of which have received Newbery Medals. *Fishing in the Air* was published in 2000.

On the subject of fishing, Mrs. Creech confesses a lack of interest in the sport itself. Yet she continues to enjoy the process: the setting, the conversation, the opportunity it creates to build a relationship with a companion.

She writes, "I don't really like fishing...I mean the act of catching fish. What I do love is sitting in a rowboat or on the dock with a fishing rod, casting lazily into the air. To me fishing is more about being outside in a tranquil setting, smelling the air, gazing at the water and the sky. It is also about the small and large exchanges between you and whoever you are with...many of my father's gifts were an appreciation for the outdoors, a way of seeing and smelling and feeling things that you could "catch" and bring home with you and call upon when you needed them."

NOTES:

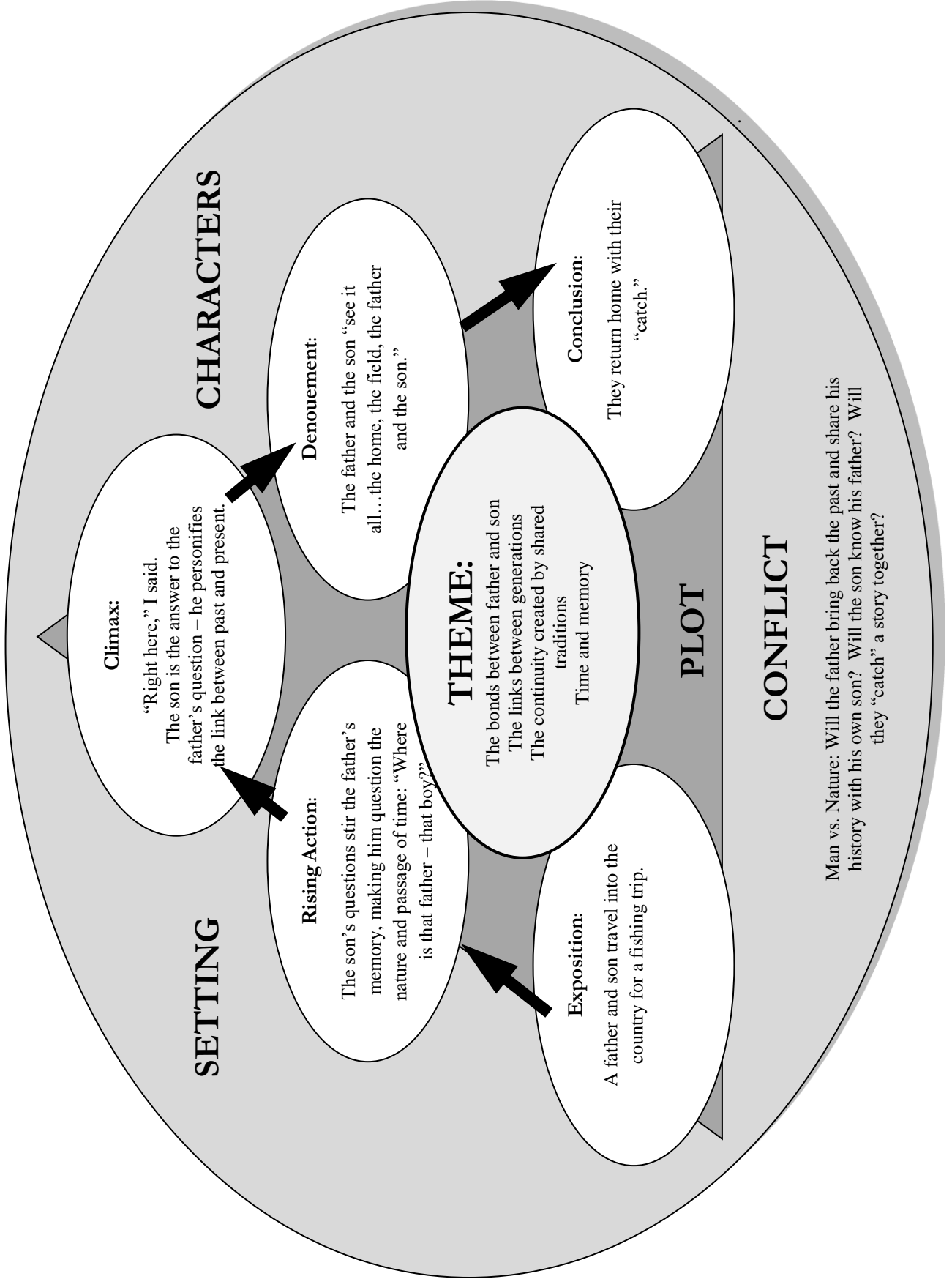
STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central *conflict*. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

Fishing in the Air by Sharon Creech: Story Chart



Fishing in the Air by Sharon Creech: Blank Story Chart

