



Cynthia Rylant's
The Relatives Came

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Missy Andrews



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THE RELATIVES CAME



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QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>The Relatives Came</i> by Cynthia Rylant ISBN-10: 0874995329 ISBN-13: 978-0689717383
Plot	When relatives from Virginia descend upon the narrator's family home, they invade his personal space. Yet, when they depart, he finds the house too empty and quiet, making him anticipate their next visit.
Setting	Summer vacation A family
Characters	The narrator, a child (this is a first person narration) An extended family
Conflict	Man vs. Man: The chaos that extended family visits bring. Close spaces.
Theme	When the relatives arrive, the house bursts with joy and activity. The hugging and laughing and eating that ensue are as exhausting as they are wonderful. Things are broken and fixed again. Fruit is harvested, and stories are told. Author Cynthia Rylant evokes vivid recollections of family reunions in <i>The Relatives Came</i> . Simultaneously recalling the joys and discomforts of family visits through the childish, honest eyes of the narrator, she captures both the warmth of family relationships and the difficulty of close quarters. Her colorful recap leaves readers longing for the next visit right along with the narrator.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



Who is the story about? (3)

There is no single protagonist. The story is told in the first person by one of the children in the family receiving visitors. The narrator's voice is not intrusive. He is one of the members of his immediate family, recalling the wild and wonderful visit. No names are ever mentioned.

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)

The character is a member of a social group – his family.

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)

Most important to this group is spending time with one another. This is clear since the immediate family of the narrator is willing and happy to do without privacy, personal space, peace, quiet, and their harvest to have their extended relatives come stay for a while.

Who else is the story about? (4)

The extended family, the relatives, are noisy, boisterous, demonstrative, helpful, and warm. They aren't antagonistic to the main character. They love him. The underlying conflict in the story is the chaos that they bring into the peaceful home during their stay.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



What does the protagonist want? (5)

When the relatives are away, the family wants to see them. When they are present, they wish for quiet and peace again. The nature of the conflict takes care of itself.

Why can't he have it? (6)

The conflict is both Man vs. Man (too crowded, too noisy) and Man vs. Nature (spatial separation). While the first conflict will be resolved when the family returns to their home far away, the second will remain. It's this underlying conflict of separation that drives the story. The story itself bridges the underlying conflict. These simultaneous conflicts create a pleasant tension that make both the visit and the time between visits easier to bear.

What happens in the story? (8)

Relatives drive up from Virginia. They descend on the narrator's family, eat up their food, take up their personal space, breathe, help, hug, and laugh.

How is the main problem solved? (9)

The problem is largely solved by the relatives' departure.

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)

When the relatives have eaten up all the strawberries and melons and promised the narrator's family some of their peaches, they pack up and leave.

How does the story end? (10)

The story ends as it began, with more hugging, eating, and breathing, and then a departure. Once the relatives have left, the house seems too big and quiet. Immediately, they miss the relatives and begin planning their next visit.

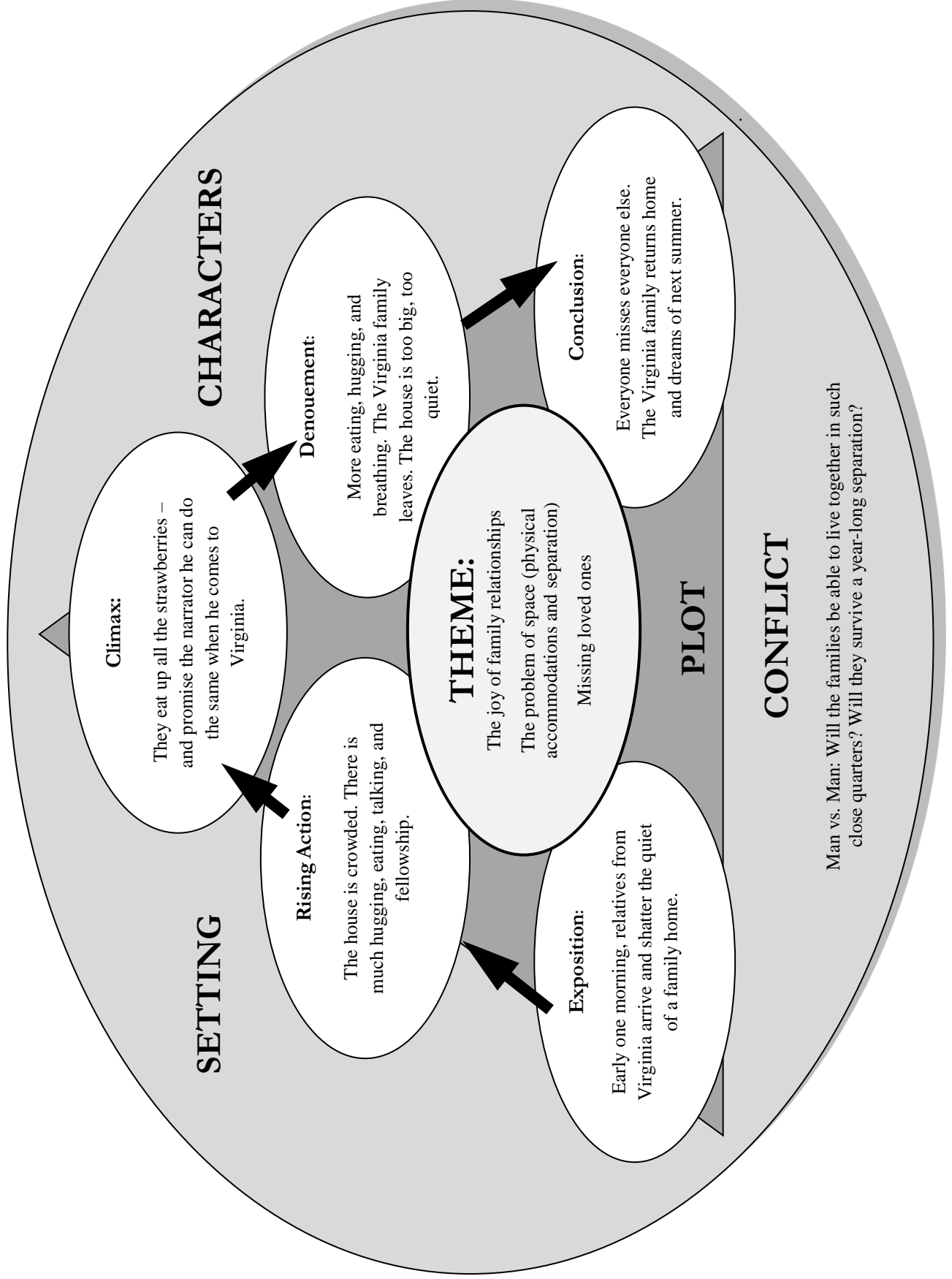
STORY CHARTS



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.

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant: Story Chart



The Relatives Came by Cynthia Ryland: Blank Story Chart

