A Wagner Matinée

MEET WILLA CATHER

Although she spent fewer than thirteen years living on the Nebraskan prairie, readers best remember Willa Cather for her portrayal of the pioneer life and landscape. During the mid-twentieth century, the connection between Cather’s writing and the prairie that inspired her began to undermine her literary status. Critics labeled her a regional writer, criticizing her for “escapism” and for romanticizing the American past. Nonetheless, Cather’s books have never gone out of print, and there has been a renewed interest in her work over the past two decades. Cather is now recognized as a writer who explored the complexities of American life and showed how the tendency to link one’s life to the past adds meaning—though not always happiness—to life in the present.

“So the country and I had it out together and by the end of the first autumn the shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion that I have never been able to shake. It has been the happiness and curse of my life.”

—Willa Cather

The Vast Frontier  Cather’s family moved from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia to rural Red Cloud, Nebraska, when she was nine years old. Cather remarked that she felt “a kind of erasure of personality” as she first encountered the Nebraskan prairie, a feeling that would later permeate the characters in her fiction. In Red Cloud, Cather’s initial homesickness gave way to curiosity about the ethnically diverse frontier town. She gained insight into the hardships of pioneer life and the intricate histories of her European immigrant neighbors. She learned French, German, Latin, and Greek, participated in plays, and attended local opera performances. In high school, Cather gained a reputation as both a remarkable student and a nonconformist. She enrolled at the University of Nebraska in 1891 and supported herself by writing bold literary reviews that earned her statewide recognition.

Returning East  After graduating in 1895, Cather moved to Pittsburgh to begin editing for a woman’s magazine, Home Monthly. She published her first poetry collection, April Twilights, in 1903 and a collection of stories, The Troll Garden, which includes “A Wagner Matinée,” in 1905. The head of the progressive magazine McClure’s was so impressed by The Troll Garden that he offered Cather a job in New York City. She became the magazine’s managing editor by 1908 but felt unfulfilled because her position left little time to work on her own writing. In 1911, at the urging of her friend and mentor Sarah Orne Jewett, Cather left journalism to write fiction exclusively. Although she never moved back to the prairie, Cather’s memories of that vast landscape and the endurance of its people inspired several works, including O Pioneers! (1913), Song of the Lark (1915), and My Ántonia (1918). In her earlier stories, Cather focused on the desolation of pioneer life, including the lack of access to art and music. In later works, however, she celebrated the prairie landscape and the powerful dreams and illusions of those who attempted to cultivate it. Cather is recognized for her complex treatment of human emotion, her understanding of darker American themes, and her carefully crafted writing style.

Willa Cather was born in 1873 and died in 1947.

For more about Willa Cather, go to www.glencoe.com.
Connecting to the Story

Have you ever moved away from or left a place and returned to it much later? How can music affect memory? As you read, think about the following questions:

• Why might revisiting a place one has chosen to leave be painful?
• How might hearing music affect memory in unique ways?

Building Background

The title “A Wagner Matinée” refers to the German composer Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813–1883). A brilliant composer, Wagner revolutionized opera by creating works with uninterrupted musical scores and passionate, crashing sounds. Willa Cather based “A Wagner Matinée” on her Aunt Franc’s and Uncle George’s experience of moving to Nebraska after the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862. The act allowed settlers and immigrants who were at least twenty-one years old to claim 160 acres of public land. They would fully own the land once they farmed it and lived there for five years.

Setting Purposes for Reading

**Big Idea**  **Regionalism**

As you read “A Wagner Matinée,” note how the story’s conflict centers on where the characters live and the opportunities opened or closed to them as a result.

**Literary Element**  **Point of View**

Point of view refers to the relationship of the narrator to the story. In *first-person point of view*, the story is told by one of the characters, referred to as “I,” and the reader sees everything through that character’s eyes. In *third-person limited point of view*, the narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of only one character, referred to as “he” or “she.” In an *omniscient point of view*, the narrator knows everything about the characters and events. As you read the story, examine how point of view influences your understanding.


**Reading Strategy**  **Identifying Sequence**

To identify sequence means to find the logical order of ideas or events. Main events are often told in chronological order, but authors sometimes reveal important events and details through flashbacks. Be sure to identify the chronological order of events to better understand the themes, relationships, and events crucial to the story.

**Reading Tip: Charting Story Sequence** Make a diagram like the one shown to organize the events of the story into chronological order.

**Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>legacy</td>
<td>n. an inheritance; p. 520 Paul’s generous grandfather left him a legacy when he died.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reproach</td>
<td>n. an expression of disapproval; a reprimand; p. 521 Kim missed curfew and suffered her mother’s reproach.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doggedly</td>
<td>adv. in a stubbornly persistent manner; obstinately; p. 521 The salesman doggedly pursued customers, even when they rebuffed him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trepidation</td>
<td>n. nervous anticipation; anxiety; p. 522 Dana could not shake her feeling of trepidation about the next day’s exam.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obliquely</td>
<td>adv. in a slanting or sloping direction; p. 523 Her hair hung obliquely across her face, hiding her left eye.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vocabulary Tip: Analogies** An analogy is a comparison to show similarities between things that are otherwise dissimilar.
I received one morning a letter, written in pale ink on glassy, blue-lined note-paper, and bearing the postmark of a little Nebraska village. This communication, worn and rubbed, looking as if it has been carried for some days in a coat pocket that was none too clean, was from my uncle Howard, and informed me that his wife had been left a small legacy by a bachelor relative, and that it would be necessary for her to go to Boston to attend to the settling of the estate. He requested me to meet her at the station and render her whatever services might be necessary. On examining the date indicated as that of her arrival, I found it to be no later than tomorrow. He had characteristically delayed writing until, had I been away from home for a day, I must have missed my aunt altogether.

The name of my Aunt Georgiana opened before me a gulf of recollection so wide and deep that, as the letter dropped from my hand, I felt suddenly a stranger to all the present conditions of my existence, wholly ill at ease and out of place amid the familiar surroundings of my study. I became, in short, the gangling farmer-boy my aunt had known, scourged with chilblains and bashfulness, my hands cracked and sore from the corn husking. I sat again before her parlour organ, fumbling the scales with my stiff, red fingers, while she, beside me, made canvas mittens for the huskers.

The next morning, after preparing my landlady for a visitor, I set out for the station. When the train arrived I had some difficulty in finding my aunt. She was the last of the passengers to alight, and it was not until I got her into the carriage that she seemed really to recognize me. She had come all the way in a day coach; her linen duster had become black with soot and her black bonnet grey with dust during the journey. When we arrived at my boarding-house the landlady put her to bed at once and I did not see her again until the next morning.

1. Render means “to make available” or “to provide.”

- **Vocabulary**
  - **legacy** (leg’ a sé) n. an inheritance

2. **Scoured** means “afflicted;”
3. **Chilblains** are red, swollen sores on the skin caused by exposure to the cold.
4. **A duster** is a long, lightweight coat worn to protect one’s clothing from dust.

**Reading Strategy**  Identifying Sequence  How does the narration shift after Clark sees Aunt Georgiana’s name in the letter?
Whatever shock Mrs. Springer experienced at my aunt’s appearance, she considerately concealed. As for myself, I saw my aunt’s battered figure with that feeling of awe and respect with which we behold explorers who have left their ears and fingers north of Franz-Joseph-Land, or their health somewhere along the Upper Congo. My Aunt Georgiana had been a music teacher at the Boston Conservatory, somewhere back in the latter sixties. One summer, while visiting in the little village among the Green Mountains where her ancestors had dwelt for generations, she had kindled the callow fancy of my uncle, Howard Carpenter, then an idle, shiftless boy of twenty-one. When she returned to her duties in Boston, Howard followed her, and the upshot of this infatuation was that she eloped with him, eluding the reproaches of her family and the criticism of her friends by going with him to the Nebraska frontier. Carpenter, who, of course, had no money, took up a homestead in Red Willow County, fifty miles from the railroad. There they had measured their land themselves, driving across the prairie in a wagon, to the wheel of which they had tied a red cotton handkerchief, and counting its revolutions. They built a dug-out in the red hillside, one of those cave dwellings whose inmates so often reverted to primitive conditions. Their water they got from the lagoons where the buffalo drank, and their slender stock of provisions was always at the mercy of bands of roving Indians. For thirty years my aunt had not been farther than fifty miles from the homestead.

I owed to this woman most of the good that ever came my way in my boyhood, and had a reverential affection for her. During the years when I was riding herd for my uncle, my aunt, after cooking the three meals—the first of which was ready at six o’clock in the morning—and putting the six children to bed, would often stand until midnight at her ironing-board, with me at the kitchen table beside her, hearing me recite Latin declensions and conjugations, gently shaking me when my drowsy head sank down over a page of irregular verbs. It was to her, at her ironing or mending, that I read my first Shakspeare, and her old text-book on mythology was the first that ever came into my empty hands. She taught me my scales and exercises on the little parlor organ which her husband had bought her after fifteen years, during which she had not so much as seen a musical instrument. She would sit beside me by the hour, damping and counting, while I struggled with the “Joyous Farmer.” She seldom talked to me about music, and I understood why. Once when I had been doggedly beating out some easy passages from an old score of Euryanthe I had found among her music books, she came up to me and, putting her hands over my eyes, gently drew my head back upon her shoulder, saying tremulously, “Don’t love it so well, Clark, or it may be taken from you.”

When my aunt appeared on the morning after her arrival in Boston, she was still in a semi-somnambulant state. She seemed not to realize that she was in the city where she had spent her youth, the place longed for hungrily half a lifetime. She had been so wretchedly train-sick throughout the journey that she had no recollection of anything but her discomfort, and, to all intents and purposes, there were but a few hours of nightmare between the farm in Red Willow County and my study on Newbury Street. I had planned a little pleasure for her that afternoon, to repay her for some of the glorious moments she had given me when we used to milk together in the straw-thatched cowshed and she, because I was more than usually tired, or

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5. Franz-Joseph-Land is a group of islands in the Arctic Ocean.
6. The Congo River in central Africa is also called the Zaire River.
7. The Green Mountains extend from western Massachusetts through Vermont and into Canada.
8. Callow means “inexperienced” or “immature.”
9. Reverential means “with a feeling of deep respect and awe.”
10. Declensions are different forms of nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. Conjugations are different forms of verbs. Students often memorize these forms when learning a new language.
12. Euryanthe (ä’ úr’ i an’ tā) is an opera by the German composer Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826).
13. Tremulously means “in a trembling or shaking manner.”
14. Semi-somnambulant (sem’ é som nam’ bī lant) means “bewildered or dazed, as if sleepwalking.”

**Literary Element** | **Point of View** | **How is your understanding of this passage affected by the point of view of the story?**

**Vocabulary**

reproach (ri prōch’) n. an expression of disapproval; a reprimand

doggedly (dō’ gid’ lē) adv. in a stubbornly persistent manner; obstinately
because her husband had spoken sharply to me, would tell me of the splendid performance of the Huguenots she had seen in Paris, in her youth.

At two o’clock the Symphony Orchestra was to give a Wagner program, and I intended to take my aunt; though, as I conversed with her, I grew doubtful about her enjoyment of it. I suggested our visiting the Conservatory and the Common before lunch, but she seemed altogether too timid to wish to venture out. She questioned me about various changes in the city, but she was chiefly concerned that she had forgotten to leave instructions about feeding half skimmed milk to a certain weakling calf, “old Maggie’s calf, you know, Clark,” she explained, evidently having forgotten how long I had been away. She was further troubled because she had neglected to tell her daughter about the freshly opened kit of mackerel in the cellar, which would spoil if it were not used directly.

I asked her whether she had ever heard any of the Wagnerian operas, and found that she had not, though she was perfectly familiar with their respective situations, and had once possessed the piano score of The Flying Dutchman. I began to think it would be best to get her back to Red Willow County without waking her, and regretted having suggested the concert.

From the time we entered the concert hall, however, she was a trifle less passive and inert, and for the first time seemed to perceive her surroundings. I had felt some trepidation lest she might become aware of her queer, country clothes, or might experience some painful embarrassment at stepping suddenly into the world to which she had been dead for a quarter of a century. But, again, I found how superficially I had judged her. She sat looking about her with eyes as impersonal, almost as stony, as those with which the granite Rameses in a museum watches the froth and fret that ebbs and flows about his pedestal. I have seen this same aloofness in old miners who drift into the Brown hotel at Denver, their pockets full of bullion, their linen soiled, their haggard faces unshaven, standing in the thronged corridors as solitary as though they were still in a frozen camp on the Yukon.

The matinée audience was made up chiefly of women. One lost the contour of faces and figures, indeed any effect of line whatever, and there was only the color of bodices past counting, the shimmer of fabrics soft and firm, silky and sheer; red, mauve, pink, blue, lilac, purple, écru, rose, yellow, cream, and white, all the colors that an impressionist finds in a sunlit landscape, with here and there the dead shadow of a frock coat. My Aunt

15. Huguenots (hū’ gan’ots’) is a French opera by the German composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864).
Georgiana regarded them as though they had been so many daubs of tube-paint on a palette.

When the musicians came out and took their places, she gave a little stir of anticipation, and looked with quickening interest down over the rail at that invariable grouping, perhaps the first wholly familiar thing that had greeted her eye since she had left old Maggie and her weakling calf. I could feel how all those details sank into her soul, for I had not forgotten how they had sunk into mine when I came fresh from ploughing forever and forever between green aisles of corn, where, as in a treadmill, one might walk from daybreak to dusk without perceiving a shadow of change. The clean profiles of the musicians, the gloss of their linen, the dull black of their coats, the beloved shapes of the instruments, the patches of yellow light on the smooth, varnished bellies of the 'cellos and the bass viols in the rear, the restless, wind-tossed forest of fiddle necks and bows—I recalled how, in the first orchestra I ever heard, those long bow-strokes seemed to draw the heart out of me, as a conjurer’s stick reels out yards of paper ribbon from a hat.

The first number was the Tamháuse overture. When the horns drew out the first strain of the Pilgrim’s chorus, Aunt Georgiana clutched my coat sleeve. Then it was I first realized that for her this broke a silence of thirty years. I saw again the tall, naked house on the prairie, black and grim as a wooden fortress; the black pond where I had learned to swim, its margin pitted with sun-dried cattle tracks; the rain gullied clay banks about the naked house, the four dwarf ash seedlings where the dishcloths were always hung to dry before the kitchen door. The world there was the flat world of the ancients; to the east, a cornfield that stretched to daybreak; to the west, a corral that reached to sunset; between, the conquests of peace, dearer-bought than those of war.

The overture closed, my aunt released my coat sleeve, but she said nothing. She sat staring dully at the orchestra. What, I wondered, did she get from it? She had been a good pianist in her day, I knew, and her musical education had been broader than that of most music teachers of a quarter of a century ago. She had often told me of Mozart’s operas and Meyerbeer’s, and I could remember hearing her sing, years ago, certain melodies of Verdi.24 When I had fallen ill with a fever in her house she used to sit by my cot in the evening—when the cool, night wind blew in through the faded mosquito netting tacked over the window and I lay watching a certain bright star that burned red above the cornfield—and sing “Home to our mountains, O, let us return!” in a way fit to break the heart of a Vermont boy near dead of homesickness already.

I watched her closely through the prelude to Tristan and Isolde, trying vainly to conjecture what that seething turmoil of strings and winds might mean to her, but she sat mutely staring at the violin bows that drove obliquely downward, like the pelting streaks of rain in a summer shower. Had this music any message for her? Had she enough left to at all comprehend this power which had kindled the world since she had left it? I was in a fever of curiosity, but Aunt Georgiana sat silent upon her peak in Darien.25 She preserved this utter immobility throughout the number from The Flying Dutchman, though her fingers worked mechanically upon her black dress, as if, of themselves, they were recalling the piano score they had once played. Poor hands! They had been stretched and twisted into mere tentacles to hold and lift and knead with; on one of them a thin, worn band that had once been a wedding ring.

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24. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (wool’ gal’ a’ ma dâ’ as mots’ sârt) (1756–1791) was an Austrian composer. Giuseppe Verdi (joop ze’ per’ di) (1813–1901) was an Italian composer of opera.

25. The phrase “peak in Darien” (dâr’ è en’) alludes to the poem “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” by John Keats. The poem describes Spanish explorers on a mountain in Darien, now Panama, who stand silently and in awe, as the first Europeans to view the Pacific Ocean.
As I pressed and gently quieted one of those groping hands, I remembered with quivering eyelids their services for me in other days. 

Soon after the tenor began the “Prize Song,” I heard a quick drawn breath and turned to my aunt. Her eyes were closed, but the tears were glistening on her cheeks, and I think, in a moment more, they were in my eyes as well. It never really died, then—the soul which can suffer so excruciatingly and so interminably; it withers to the outward eye only; like that strange moss which can lie on a dusty shelf half a century and yet, if placed in water, grows green again. She wept so throughout the development and elaboration of the melody.

During the intermission before the second half, I questioned my aunt and found that the “Prize Song” was not new to her. Some years before there had drifted to the farm in Red Willow County a young German, a tramp cow-puncher, who had sung in the chorus at Bayreuth when he was a boy, along with the other peasant boys and girls. Of a Sunday morning he used to sit on his gingham-sheeted bed in the hands’ bedroom which opened off the kitchen, cleaning the leather of his boots and saddle, singing the “Prize Song,” while my aunt went about her work in the kitchen. She had hovered over him until she had prevailed upon him to join the country church, though his sole fitness for this step, in so far as I could gather, lay in his boyish face and his possession of this divine melody. Shortly afterward, he had gone to town on the Fourth of July, been drunk for several days, lost his money at a faro table, ridden a saddled Texas steer on a bet, and disappeared with a fractured collar-bone. All this my aunt told me huskily, waveringly, as though she were talking in the weak lapses of illness.

“Well, we have come to better things than the old Trovatore at any rate, Aunt Georgie?” I queried, with a well meant effort at jocularity.

Her lip quivered and she hastily put her handkerchief up to her mouth. From behind it she murmured, “And you have been hearing this ever since you left me, Clark?” Her question was the gentlest and saddest of reproaches.

The second half of the program consisted of four numbers from the Ring, and closed with Siegfried’s funeral march. My aunt wept quietly, but almost continuously, as a shallow vessel overflows in a rain-storm. From time to time her dim eyes looked up at the lights, burning softly under their dull glass globes.

The deluge of sound poured on and on; I never knew what she found in the shining current of it; I never knew how far it bore her, or past what happy islands. From the trembling of her face I could well believe that before the last number she had been carried out where the myriad graves are, into the grey, nameless burying grounds of the sea; or into some world of death vaster yet, where, from the beginning of the world, hope has lain down with hope and dream with dream and, renouncing, slept.

The concert was over; the people filed out of the hall chattering and laughing, glad to relax and find the living level again, but my kinswoman made no effort to rise. The harpist slipped the green felt cover over his instrument; the flute-players shook the water from their mouthpieces; the men of the orchestra went out one by one, leaving the stage to the chairs and music stands, empty as a winter cornfield.

I spoke to my aunt. She burst into tears and sobbed pleadingly. “I don’t want to go, Clark, I don’t want to go!”

I understood. For her, just outside the concert hall, lay the black pond with the cattle-tracked bluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curlcd boards, naked as a tower; the crook-backed ash seedlings where the dish-cloths hung to dry; the gaunt, moulting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door.

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26. **Cowpuncher** means “cowboy.”
27. **Bayreuth** (bi’roth”) is a German city famous for its annual Wagnerian music festival.
28. **Faro** (fär’ō) is a gambling game played with a deck of cards.
29. **Trovatore** (tro va tör’re) refers to *Il Trovatore*, an opera by Giuseppe Verdi.
30. **Jocularity** means “joking” or “humor.”
31. **Myriad** means “countless” or “innumerable.”
32. **Renouncing** means “giving up.”
33. **Gaunt** means “extremely thin.”

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**Literary Element**  
**Point of View** How does Clark know what his aunt is feeling?
RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond
1. How did the story affect your impressions of nineteenth-century frontier life?

Recall and Interpret
2. (a) How does Clark react to the letter from his uncle? (b) Why does he react so strongly to the letter?
3. The narrator says that he owed to his aunt “most of the good that ever came my way in my boyhood.” How is her influence apparent in his adult life?
4. (a) How does Georgiana behave after the concert ends? (b) What might the concert hall symbolize for her?

Analyze and Evaluate
5. (a) Georgiana seldom talks to Clark about music. Why then does she tell Clark about the Huguenots performance she saw in Paris? (b) Given Georgiana’s reaction to the Wagner concert, how do concerts probably affect her in general?
6. Clark says of scenery on the farm: “one might walk from daybreak to dusk without perceiving a shadow of change.” To whom might this statement be considered false and why?
7. After his experience with Georgiana, how might Clark perceive his access to concerts in Boston differently?

Connect
8. Big Idea Regionalism The story contrasts the limits of one region with the opportunities of another. What might these two “regions” be in Georgiana’s view, specifically? Support your claim with evidence from the story.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Literary Element Point of View
It is clear that “A Wagner Matinée” is written with a first-person point of view because the story is filtered through the sensations, thoughts, and memories of Clark, the narrator. The use of pronouns such as I, you, and me also indicates first-person point of view.

In stories told in first-person point of view, the narrator is always a character in the story. As you read stories told in first person, note that any story told from one perspective is limited to that character’s knowledge, experience, and biases. The narrator may not be reliable, so judge whether you can trust that his or her interpretation of events is accurate. Pay attention to details in the story to help evaluate narrator reliability and to figure out parts of the story the narrator may not know or share.

1. Why might the reader trust Clark’s interpretation of Georgiana?
2. Although Georgiana rarely speaks directly in the story, what details about her confirm Clark’s interpretations?

Review: Voice
Voice refers to the distinctive language that conveys the author or narrator’s personality to the reader. Voice is determined by elements of style such as word choice, sentence structure, and tone.

Partner Activity Meet with a partner to discuss how Clark’s voice is revealed in the following passage. Then answer the questions that follow.

“Had this music any message for her? Had she enough left to at all comprehend this power which had kindled the world since she had left it? I was in a fever of curiosity, but Aunt Georgiana sat silent upon her peak in Darien.”

1. What does Clark’s use of questions reveal?
2. What do words such as power, kindled, and fever and the Darien allusion reveal about Clark?
3. How does Clark’s voice convey his personality?
**Reading Strategy** Identifying Sequence

A **flashback** is an interruption in the chronological order of a story that depicts an earlier event. Flashbacks can be used to give readers background about the main events of the story.

1. **How does the flashback about Clark as a boy playing “Joyous Farmer” help the reader?**
2. **What provokes most of the flashbacks in the story?**
3. **Why might Cather have chosen to use flashback instead of organizing the events chronologically?**

**Vocabulary** Practice

**Practice with Analogies** Choose the word that best completes the analogy.

1. grandparent : legacy :: groom :
   - a. house
   - b. ring
   - c. bride
   - d. husband

2. quickly : fast :: doggedly :
   - a. stubborn
   - b. proud
   - c. obediently
   - d. docile

3. reproach : disapproval :: compliment :
   - a. criticism
   - b. approval
   - c. affection
   - d. attention

4. sweat : trepidation :: wink :
   - a. anxiety
   - b. blink
   - c. mischief
   - d. eye

5. obliquely : direction :: passionately :
   - a. reason
   - b. instinct
   - c. spontaneously
   - d. feeling

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**Writing About Literature**

**Evaluate Author’s Craft** In fiction, **author’s craft** refers to how an author uses various techniques, including word choice, sensory details, figurative language, and dialogue, to tell a story. In “A Wagner Matinée,” Willa Cather uses comparisons as a technique to explore the relationship between Clark and Aunt Georgiana and the effects of the concert on both characters.

> “As for myself, I saw my aunt’s battered figure with that feeling of awe and respect…”

**Comparison** Aunt Georgiana’s aged figure is compared to Clark’s memory of her.

**Evaluation** Clark’s comment on his aunt’s figure allows the reader to see that she has changed much since he last saw her and that she looks different from the women in Boston. The comparison alludes to the amount of time they have spent apart and to the differences between frontier and city life.

Write an essay evaluating how the use of comparisons in “A Wagner Matinée” contributes to the meaning of the story. As you draft, follow the plan below to help organize your essay.

1. **Introduction**
   - Present your evaluation.

2. **First Comparison**
   - Cite the comparisons and evaluate how they contribute to the story.

3. **Second Comparison**

4. **Third Comparison**

5. **Conclusion**
   - Summarize your evaluation and add insight.

When you are done writing, proofread and edit your draft for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Then meet with a partner and exchange drafts. Check to make sure your partner’s evaluation is clear and well supported with examples from the story.
**Lost Pleasures**

Pleasures can be lost in different ways. Sometimes we may give up a pleasure deliberately to achieve some higher goal. In other instances, a pleasure may be taken away from us against our will. At times, we don’t even realize how pleasurable something has been until it somehow disappears from our lives. Before you read “A Wagner Matinée,” note in the following chart examples of these three kinds of lost pleasures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Pleasure Given Up Deliberately</th>
<th>A Pleasure Taken Away</th>
<th>A Pleasure Appreciated Too Late</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. After you read “A Wagner Matinée,” decide in which column or columns of the chart Georgiana’s lost pleasure should appear. Briefly explain your choice on the following lines.

   ___________________________________________

   ___________________________________________

   ___________________________________________

2. Which of the lost pleasures that you noted in the chart do you consider to be the greatest loss? Briefly explain your answer.

   ___________________________________________

   ___________________________________________

   ___________________________________________
Synonyms and Context Clues

The following sentences contain italicized synonyms of the Words to Own in boldface type below. For each synonym, write the correct Word to Own in the blank. Then, circle any context clues that tip you off to the word’s meaning.

**EXAMPLE:** aloofness

Clark perceived a certain detachment in his aunt’s cool demeanor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>deluge</th>
<th>eluding</th>
<th>grotesque</th>
<th>inert</th>
<th>legacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>myriad</td>
<td>obliquely</td>
<td>pious</td>
<td>reverential</td>
<td>trepidation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Clark was worried, naturally feeling a certain apprehension about seeing Georgiana after all these years.

2. Even indirectly, looking at her sidelong as she got off the train, Clark could see tremendous changes in his aunt.

3. Clark experienced a torrent of memories, with childhood recollections rising like a flood within him.

4. Though Georgiana was not exactly bizarre, some changes in her did strike Clark as strange and absurd.

5. At first she seemed listless, moving slowly in a dull sort of way.

6. Once she was in the concert hall, Georgiana became animated and lively, infinite expressions moving across her face.

7. There is a pietistic sentiment that one takes on when undergoing a religious experience.

8. Georgiana’s expression was worshipful as she listened with deep respect to the music.

9. Clark was grateful for the gift of music that Georgiana had given to him.

10. Georgiana’s actual thoughts kept escaping Clark’s grasp, defying easy understanding.
Literary Element (page 519)
Point of View

A Wagner Matinée  WILLA CATHER

The point of view from which a story is told affects the way you understand that story. Consider the following sentence from “A Wagner Matinée”:

The name of my Aunt Georgina opened before me a gulf so wide and deep that, as the letter dropped from my hand, I felt suddenly a stranger to all the present conditions of my existence, wholly ill at ease and out of place…. (p. 520)

Now imagine how the sentence would present the same information if it were told from the point of view of a third-person observer:

Clark looked at the letter and accidentally dropped it on the floor.

How are these two examples different? As you consider the point of view in a story, think about the reasons why an author chose that point of view. In the examples above, you can see that the author wants the reader to know the inner feelings of Clark, the narrator, and how the events of the story affect his character.

Using the example from above, here is a model of how to analyze the way point of view can affect your comprehension of the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Point of View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…I felt suddenly a stranger to all the present conditions of my existence, wholly ill at ease and out of place….</td>
<td>Clark is deeply affected by his aunt’s letter. Seeing his point of view leads me to predict that she will play a significant role in this story, and will influence his appreciation of life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACTIVITY

Directions  In the following chart, note at least two passages in which you think the point of view is particularly important to the story. Then explain how the point of view affects your understanding of that passage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Point of View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Reading Strategy (page 519)

Identifying Sequence

A Wagner Matinée  WILLA CATHER

Usually, a narrative story flows in chronological order, that is, in the sequence in which events occur. However, an author may also use tools such as flashbacks and flash-forwards to show something a character remembers or to foreshadow a story development. In “A Wagner Matinée,” Cather uses flashbacks to give the reader insight into the backgrounds of Clark and Aunt Georgiana.

ACTIVITY

Directions  In the chart below are three examples of flashbacks in “A Wagner Matinée.” Using the first row as a model, analyze why the author might have chosen to introduce the flashpoint at that juncture in the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flashback</th>
<th>Why Author Used It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“When she returned to her duties in Boston, Howard followed her, and the upshot of this infatuation was that she eloped with him…” (p. 521)</td>
<td>We see that Georgiana was a cultured, urbane young woman, who was driven by passion. This image is shocking after we first see Georgiana as a “battered figure.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Once, when I had been doggedly beating out some easy passages…she [said], “Don’t love it so well, Clark or it may be taken from you.” (p. 521)</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark remembers his first time seeing an orchestra: “…those long bow-strokes seemed to draw the heart out of me, as a conjurer’s stick reels out yards of paper ribbon from a hat.”</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active Reading Graphic Organizer

As you read, note the sequence in which Cather presents events. Ask your teacher for a copy of the Two-Column Graphic Organizer so that you can record more examples of changes in time, from the story’s present to memories. In the second column, analyze why Cather might have chosen to present events in that order.
Selection Vocabulary Practice (page 519)

A Wagner Matinée  WILLA CATHER

Vocabulary

legacy  n.  an inheritance
reproach  n.  an expression of disapproval; a reprimand
doggedly  adv.  in a stubborn or persistent manner; obstinately
trepidation  n.  nervous anticipation; anxiety
obliquely  adv.  in a slanting or sloping direction

EXERCISE A  Practice with Analogies

Choose the word that best completes the analogy.

1. reproach : praise :: naiveté :
   A. kindness  C. innocence
   B. worldliness
   D. commendation

2. trepidation : quake :: mourning :
   A. wail
   B. fear  C. work  D. laugh

3. obliquely : directly :: apathetically :
   A. passionately
   B. quickly  C. smoothly
   D. secretly

4. legacy : inheritance :: charity :
   A. money
   B. virtue
   C. miserliness
   D. donation

EXERCISE B  Applying Meanings

Fill in each blank with a vocabulary word that best fits the context of the sentence.

1. Each huge wave rocked the boat and caused the deck to tilt ___________.
2. Tim sat for hours, trying ___________ to solve the puzzle.
3. Lars had broken the rules and was prepared for his father’s angry ___________.
4. Afraid of heights, Hal approached the edge of the cliff with ___________.

EXERCISE C  Responding to the Selection

On the back of this sheet, write a paragraph about an older relative or family friend who has had a positive influence on your life. Use at least THREE of the vocabulary words in your paragraph.