

The Choices We Make

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Graphic Organizer, Marking the Text, Quickwrite, Word Map

Quickwrite: Write a description of how you would spend \$100 you found on the street.

What do you think your choices reveal about you?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Beth Pfeffer writes for children and teens and loves to write about families. In an interview, she said she likes to start her stories and novels with a “what if...” situation and then figure out the characters and plots. Born in New York City in 1948, she grew up in the city and suburbs. She published her first novel while she was in college. Since then she has written more than 60 books.

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LITERARY TERMS

Transitions are words or phrases that connect ideas, details, or events in writing.

My Notes

I got everything together, using what little strength I had left in me, and let myself into the house. Mom was at work, and Danny, my kid brother, was sitting in front of the TV, watching Dance Dynamite and finishing up a bag of potato chips I suspected he'd started not that long ago.

Things hadn't always been like this. For starters, it wasn't until this year that Danny had given up superheroes in exchange for girls dancing on TV. And it used to be that Mom stayed at home, making wholesome and nutritious snacks for us to eat when we got back from school, instead of letting us shove potato chips into our mouths. Or at least into Danny's. He ate them so fast, there were never any left by the time I got home.

Those golden days of nutritious snacks ended when Dad moved out. I have an MIA father. You know the sort. He sends a few bucks every Christmas with a note to Mom telling her to buy herself and the kids something nice, and the rest of the year he's missing in action. He's not one for halfway measures, though. When he finally did leave, after threatening to often enough, he moved six hundred miles away. His address is a post office box, and if for some reason you have to call him, his machine answers for him and swears he'll call right back. Don't hold your breath waiting.

So Mom, not wanting us to starve, got a job and became a statistic. They do studies about people like her. They call it the feminization of poverty, but I've got to tell you Mom looked a lot more feminine before she got poor. Danny looked better in those days too, but maybe the fat and the pimples would have come anyway, once he became aware of girls, and have nothing to do with his potato chip diet.

I went up to my room, thinking about how many bags of potato chips a hundred dollars could buy, threw my books down, and stared at the money a while longer. Ben Franklin had the nicest face. He looked great in green.

We ate frozen for dinner that night, each of us picking our own dinner, which Mom then threw into the oven at 350. She cooks everything at 350 these days, for half an hour, regardless of what the box says to do. As far as I can tell, it doesn't make a difference, so she's probably right going with a single system for everything frozen.

"So," she said, as we each took our trays out of the oven and spread them on the kitchen table. "Anything interesting happen at school today?"

You have to give her points for trying. Nothing interesting has happened in school for the past seven years, but she asks regularly anyway. Seven years ago the goat got loose in the cafeteria, but that’s a whole other story.

“I got an 83 in science,” Danny announced. “And Michelle Grain got sick in English and practically puked all over everybody.”

“No puking talk over dinner,” Mom said automatically. She’s ended a lot of really neat conversations with that rule. “Chris? What’s new with you?”

It was the moment I’d dreaded. I mean, you can hardly deny that finding a hundred-dollar bill is newsworthy, even if, technically speaking, it didn’t happen in school and therefore wasn’t covered by her original question.

I would have kept the news to myself, except there was no way I could come home from having spent the hundred dollars without Mom noticing. And I didn’t want her to think I’d entered into a life of crime. Mom watches a lot of sitcoms, so she worries about things like shoplifting and bank robberies.

“I found some money on the corner of Maple and Grove,” I said, trying to sound real casual about it.

I shouldn’t have bothered. Mom’s eyes lit right away, and even Danny stopped inhaling his frozen dinner.

“How much?” they both asked. It was eerie how fast they got the words out.

There are people in this world who can lie. I’m not one of them. “A hundred dollars,” I said. “I found a hundred-dollar bill.”

“A hundred bucks!” Danny breathed. “Wow!”

“A hundred dollars,” Mom said. “Well you certainly can’t keep it.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“It isn’t yours,” she replied. “You have to find its owner.”

“How am I supposed to do that?” I asked. Actually, it was a question I’d been asking myself ever since I checked the denomination. “Advertise in the paper? Ask its owner to describe what the money looks like? Does Ben Franklin wear glasses, or does he have his contacts in? Is he wearing a wedding ring? Mom, there’s no way to find

My Notes

Handwriting practice lines for notes, consisting of multiple horizontal blue lines on a light blue background.



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out who lost it.”

“What if it belonged to some poor person?” she asked, but I could see she was weakening.

“Poor people don’t carry hundred-dollar bills,” I replied.

“I bet it’s mob money,” Danny said. “And when the mob finds out it’s missing, they’ll hire a hit man to shoot Chris. Terrific!”

“No one’s going to shoot me,” I told him. “Besides, I intend to spend the money so fast, there won’t be anything for the mob to collect. I thought I’d go to the mall tomorrow and pick some stuff up.

“You can’t do that,” Mom said. “You have to give me the money.”

“How do you figure that?” I asked.

“We need it,” she said.

“I sure need it,” Danny said. “I want my share.”

“I’m not sharing,” I told him.

“Fine,” Mom said. “So you can give it to me.” I swear they must send mothers to school somewhere, when they’re in an embryonic mother state, kind of like the pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, before they become fully formed humans. At mother school, they’re taught how to ignore the obvious to go after what they want.

“If I’m not sharing, I’m not giving,” I said. “The money is mine. I found it. There’s a lot of stuff I need, and I intend to get myself some of it.”

Mom snorted. “Wait until you see how long a hundred dollars lasts,” she said.

“I look forward to finding out,” I said, trying to sound dignified.

The rest of supper was kind of a drag, with Danny whining and Mom sulking and me thinking about the money sitting on my bed, waiting for the world to come and snatch it. As soon as I could, I went back to my room and shoved the bill into the toe of my boot. Then I hid both boots under my bed. No point taking any chances.

It was positively painful sitting through school the next day. Of course having a hundred-dollar bill shoved inside my boot didn’t make things any more comfortable. I kept wiggling my toe around to make sure the money was still there, until my foot started cramping. It’s not easy being rich.

When school finally ended, I limped my way over to the mall. I hadn't figured out just how I was going to get the money out of the boot when I started buying stuff, but I figured I could always just take the boot off, whip the money out, and become a local legend.

We have a pretty good mall, with a lot of places where you could spend a hundred dollars. I started by trying on a leather jacket. It fit perfectly, and it made me feel great. I also liked the idea of buying just one perfect thing with the money. After all, if I bought a lot of little stuff, I could buy any one of those things on my own, and it would just be a case of quantity, not quality. But I'd have to save for years to buy a leather jacket, until by the time I could afford it I probably wouldn't want it anyway.

The jacket was on sale too. It had been \$120, but it was marked down to \$98. I took it over to the sales register, where the woman looked me over real carefully and asked if it was cash or charge.

"Cash," I told her, feeling for the thousandth time the money in the toe.

She rang the numbers up and said "That will be a hundred and four dollars and three cents."

"No," I said. "It's ninety eight dollars. See." I showed her the price tag.

She looked at me like I had just emerged from the primordial swamp. "Sales tax," she said. "A hundred and four dollars and three cents." I didn't have a hundred and four dollars and three cents.

I had two dollars and thirty-five cents, and a hundred dollars stuffed in my boot. Add the two together, and you do not come up with a hundred and four and three cents. Believe me, I tried five different ways of adding the numbers together, and none of them worked.

"I can't afford it," I muttered.

"Kids," the saleslady said. I nearly took my boot off to throw at her, but then I decided I didn't want to buy anything that cost more than the hundred dollars anyway. It would have been cheating, somehow. So I left the store and looked for something that cost just a few dollars less. I didn't mind having a couple of bucks change left, just as long as I didn't go over my original total it was kind of like game show rules.

My Notes



WORD CONNECTIONS

An analogy shows a relationship between words and is often written with colons; for example, *sleeve* : *jacket* :: *shift key* : *keyboard*. The relationship between *sleeve* and *jacket* is the same as that between *shift key* and *keyboard*. Think of the relationship between *leaf* and *tree*. Then write the word that has the same relationship to *finger*.

Leaf is to tree as finger is to _____.



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I must have walked through that mall a half-dozen times, upstairs and down, trying to find just the right thing to buy. Most of the stuff I looked at I would have killed to own ordinarily, but somehow nothing was special enough to spend my hundred on. And things didn't cost what I thought they did. I finally decided to buy a Walkman, so I went into one of the department stores to price them. Only they had one on sale, AM/FM radio and cassette player for \$29.95. That seemed awfully cheap to me, only there was no point spending more than that for another brand just because it wasn't on sale. So I didn't buy one, and I didn't get any cassettes either. And all the books I used to dream about owning looked like crap, and suddenly I realized there was nothing at the mall I really wanted.

I sat down then, by the fountain, to collect my thoughts. There was no water in the fountain area, because of the water shortage, and its tile floor was littered with pennies and nickels. I couldn't get over how people had just tossed their money away like that, when I couldn't even make myself take my boot off.

It occurred to me then that I could buy a car for a hundred dollars. Maybe not a great car, but a car, nonetheless. I had this entire fantasy about being behind the wheel of my very own car, driving my friends around, parking in the high school lot, going to drive-ins, moving around the way you could if you owned a car. It was a pretty picture, and I was just about ready to spend part of my \$2.35 on a newspaper so I could see what cars were available for a hundred bucks, until common sense made me stop.

The problem wasn't the money for the car, or even the sales tax. I figured I could always argue the owner down the extra couple of bucks. The problem was car insurance. Somehow I didn't think I could count on finding the insurance money on the corner of Maple and Grove every six months. No insurance, no car. No car, no freedom. I still had my money, but the fun was fast going out of it.

Just to show myself that I could, I went into Woolworth's and bought some chewing gum. They were out of my brand, but I bought a package of some other brand, and broke one of my singles. The change jingled as I walked away from the mall, chewing my gum, and limping.

I found myself walking a half block out of my way, to return to the corner of Maple and Grove, but a scary thing happened once I got there. I realized I hadn't gone back to see if there was any more money there but to leave the hundred-dollar bill smack where I'd found it.

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Sequence of Events Using Transitions of Time	Identify the Choice Involved with This Incident	Character Traits or Attitudes the Choices Reveal	Textual Evidence for the Character Traits
<p>In the beginning of the story, the narrator finds a \$100 bill on the way home from school.</p>	<p>The narrator has to decide whether to pick up the money or leave it there.</p>	<p>Nervous Unsure</p>	<p>Actions: “I bent down, scooped the money up, and started walking away fast with that heartbeating sensation of having done something exciting and wrong...”</p>
<p>Then,</p>			
<p>Next,</p>			
<p>In the middle,</p>			
<p>After that,</p>			
<p>Later,</p>			
<p>Toward the end,</p>			
<p>In the end,</p>			