

Thirteen and a Half

A story about growing up

About the Story

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to compare ideas about growing up expressed in a short story and in a poem

Key Skills:

interpreting text, character, tone, theme, inference

Essential Questions:

- What do we gain and what do we lose as we go from childhood to adulthood?
- How do we deal with the death of a loved one?
- What is the basis of friendship?

Standards:

This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: **R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.9, W.2, W.9, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6**

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to *Scope Online*.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Story
- Poem

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:

- DIY Vocabulary (for fiction)
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Analyzing Poetry
- Theme: On Growing Up
- **Core Skills Workout:** Inference
- Quiz*
- **Literary Elements:** Character Thinking Tool
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Do-Now: Free Writing (5 minutes)

As students enter the classroom, have them free-write in response to the following: *How does life change as you go from being a kid to being an adult?* Then invite volunteers to share what they wrote.

2 Reading and Discussing “Thirteen and a Half”

(40 minutes)

DIFFERENTIATION: Students who need more support should first listen to the audio version.

- Read the story once through as a class.
- Divide students into groups to read the story again, pausing to discuss the close-reading questions that appear in the margins. Have students write their answers in the margins or on the **Close-Reading Questions** handout.

Answers to Close-Reading Questions

- ▶ **1. Interpreting text** (p. 23) *She means that she couldn't think of a good excuse to decline Ashley's invitation.*
- ▶ **2. Character** (p. 23) *The narrator's shrugs suggest that perhaps she prefers to keep her thoughts to herself. Or her shrugs might suggest that she is not judgmental or that she prefers to mull things over before reaching a conclusion.*
- ▶ **3. Tone** (p. 25) *The narrator does not seem to particularly admire or dislike Ashley's house. She seems to find the house a bit uncomfortable in its vastness—as when she says that she stayed close to Ashley “to avoid getting lost”—but otherwise, the narrator seems to just take it all in. She sees her own house as being typical.*
- ▶ **4. Inference** (p. 25) *Ashley believes that budgies are more “exotic” than parakeets, and this appeals to her. After all, she is a person who wants*

to “live life to the hilt,” and in her mind, it seems to be more exciting and adventurous to have an exotic bird than a regular old parakeet.

▶ **5. Theme** (p. 25) *At the beginning of the story, Ashley seems eager to grow up. She is celebrating her half-birthday and dreaming about the day she will be grown up and able to “do anything.” But now, Ashley seems to be mourning the passing of her childhood; she is sobbing as she notes that the bird's death “feels like the death of my childhood.”*

▶ **6. Inference** (p. 26) *They seem to be feeling a mix of emotions. Ashley is sad over the loss of her pet but seems also in some way to be enjoying the drama of the moment. The narrator seems like she is trying to respect Ashley's grief while at the same time feeling awkward and uncomfortable—and a bit confused about how, exactly, Ashley does feel. In the moment that the girls “sort of” smile at each other, they share a moment of uncertain closeness.*

▶ **7. Theme** (p. 26) *Answers will vary, but students may offer that over the course of the story, things have indeed shifted “subtly” for Ashley because of the loss of Sweet Pea—her first experience with death—and the revelation of her mother's deception. Some of the innocence of her childhood has been lost.*

- Come together as a class and discuss the following critical-thinking questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

▶ **Describe the personalities of the two main characters—the narrator and Ashley. Support your ideas with details from the text.** *Students should offer that Ashley is expressive, dramatic, dreamy, and quirky. She wants a life full of glamour and drama. She imagines flying and dreams of a future in which she is both a movie*

star and a veterinarian. She wants to “live life to the hilt.” She looks for meaning in small gestures (such as how a person eats a Mallomar) and imagines that her pet is more exotic than he is. She is open with her emotions, sobbing unabashedly when Sweet Pea dies. You sense that she might be a little lonely too; her mother is preoccupied with her studies, and Ashley has invited over someone she barely knows. The narrator is just the opposite: She is down-to-earth and keeps her thoughts largely to herself, often answering questions with shrugs. She doesn’t imagine flying but rather being in a bakery.

► **Describe the point of view from which the story is told—that is, who is telling the story?**

Do you think the portrayal of Ashley can be trusted? *Answers will vary. The story is told in first person, from the narrator’s point of view. Students might note that we all see the world differently, and you can assume that the narrator is presenting her view of Ashley. You get the sense that the narrator doesn’t quite know what to make of Ashley; perhaps if she were more like Ashley or had other friends more like her, she would describe Ashley differently.*

► **Do you think Ashley’s mom was right to hide the parakeets’ deaths from Ashley? Explain.** *Answers will vary.*

► **Do you think the narrator and Ashley will become friends?** *Answers will vary. On one hand, the girls have little in common; on the other, they have gone through an emotional day together. That the narrator isn’t sure how she feels about Ashley is clear from her comment “I can’t figure out if she is severely weird or like, the opposite.”*

3 Reading and Discussing “On Turning 10”

(20 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Play the audio version of “On Turning 10” a few times as students follow along in their magazines.
- In small groups or as a class, have students complete the **Analyzing Poetry** activity.

4 Skill Building Featured Skill: Theme

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

To prepare students for the prompt on page 27, have them complete the activity **Theme: On Growing Up**. For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

Does the author of “Thirteen and a Half” present growing up as a wonderful thing, a difficult thing, or a mix of both? Explain in a well-organized paragraph. Use details from the story to support your answer.

For Advanced Readers

Write a conversation between Ashley in “Thirteen and a Half” and the speaker of “On Turning 10” in which they discuss their feelings about growing up.

For Poets

Write a poem about how you felt on your last birthday—how you felt about turning the age that you turned.

For the Reflective

Create a poster with three sections. In the first, write sentences that each begin “When I was younger, I . . .” In the second, write sentences that begin “Now I . . .” In the third, write sentences that begin “When I am older, I . . .” Include art with your poster—perhaps photos or drawings of yourself at different ages.