

When It Rains

A story about two brothers and a moment of unexpected joy

About the Story

Lexile: 650L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to analyze characters in a work of short fiction

Key Skills: mood, character, author's craft, interpreting text, word choice, inference

Essential Questions:

- How do our families shape who we are?
- What are the different ways we communicate?
- How can our relationships with others transform us?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, 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 support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "The Roach"
- "Climbing Skull Mountain"
- "Home"

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Character Thinking Tool
- Discussion Questions
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Choice Board
- Double-Entry Journal
- Contest Entry Form

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

5 minutes

Note to Teachers: Books and stories by author Joseph Elliott often feature neurodivergent protagonists without labeling them as such. The character of Lukas in “When It Rains” was inspired by a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Elliott once worked with at a special education school. People with ASD may communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The abilities of people with ASD can vary significantly. For example, some people with ASD may have advanced conversation skills whereas others may be nonverbal. Some people with ASD need a lot of help in their daily lives; others work and live with little or no support. We suggest allowing students to read the story and explore its characters on their own without introducing this aspect of Lukas’s character; we alert you to it now so that you’re prepared to facilitate a rich and compassionate conversation after reading.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)


- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. Highlighted words: *adrenaline*, *brambles*, *lashed*, *plastered*. Optionally, print or share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently beforehand. (Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the interactive slides.)


2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes


- Read the “Spotlight On” box on page 29 or at the top of the digital story page. Tell students that despite the short length of the story they’re about to read (under 500 words), the author is able to develop rich characters and relationships.
- For students’ first read, have them follow along as they listen to author Joseph Elliott read his story aloud. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.

- Have students reread and annotate the story independently. Here are some symbols you might have them use:

 = I don't understand

 = love this

 = important

 = I'm thinking...

— = unfamiliar word

↔ = connection

Alternatively, have students complete a double-entry journal during their reread: In their journals or on a piece of paper, have students create a T-chart. In the left-hand column, have them record three to five lines that jump out at them or feel particularly meaningful. In the right-hand column, have them record their reactions to these lines through questions, comments, connections, or analysis. (You can find both a print and digital version of our **Double-Entry Journal** handout in the Resources tab.)

- Divide students into groups to discuss their annotations or double-entry journals. Then reconvene as a whole group and pose the following questions, some of which may draw on students' reading responses and group discussions. (If you prefer to have students answer these questions in writing, there is a print and digital **Discussion Questions** activity in the Resources tab.)

Discussion Questions

(15 minutes)

The close-reading questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- Mood is the feeling a reader gets from a work of literature. What is the mood of the first section of the story? What words in particular help create this mood?** (mood) *The mood of the first section is hectic. Words like bolted, blared, screeched, skidded, weaved, and chased make readers feel as if they're in the frenzied, loud, and out-of-control scene with the brothers. Even the mention of the "overgrown brambles" that Mylo chases Lukas through in the forest contributes to the mood—rough, tangled, prickly vines seem to match the wild and "thorny" situation Mylo and Lukas are in.*
- What does the brothers' interaction in the second section of the story reveal about Mylo?** (character) *This interaction makes clear that Mylo deeply cares for and understands Lukas. When Mylo catches up with Lukas in the woods, it's evident that Mylo is concerned not just for Lukas's physical safety, but also for Lukas's needs as a person. No matter how upset Mylo might be with Lukas, he understands that Lukas doesn't like eye contact so he doesn't demand it.*

Mylo respects Lukas's need for a certain amount of personal space, getting just close enough to let Lukas know he's not mad at him. When Lukas apologizes to Mylo, Mylo easily accepts his apology.

3. **How does the author make the reader feel as if the rain itself is a character in the story?** (author's craft) *The rain's intense presence is felt throughout this very short story. The author describes the rain and its effects on the characters with vivid sensory details from beginning to end: The rain soaks Mylo's clothing and streams down his cheeks, it makes the forest smell of damp soil and wet leaves, it's so loud Mylo has to raise his voice to be heard over it, it bounces off Lukas's hand, it lashes down around the brothers and pummels their bodies, drenching them through to their skin. The profound effect the rain has on the brothers' emotions makes it seem like a force more powerful than just the weather.*
4. **Mylo says he listened to the rainfall "drown out the world" and that the rain "made the whole world blurry." How might his words have more than one meaning?** (interpreting text) *On one level, Mylo might mean that the sound of the rainfall literally drowns out all of the other sounds in the world around them and that the rain is so heavy that it's literally difficult to see through it. On another level, it seems that the experience of being lost in the woods has slowly turned into an experience that is almost peaceful—everything seems to slow down when Mylo says, "A fat black slug crept through the grass between us." Even though the boys are lost, they're sheltered under a giant redwood tree, seemingly far away from any troubles or challenges that exist elsewhere at the moment, even those of the past few minutes.*
5. **Consider this line: "Dad sighed, the anger drizzling out of him." What is interesting about the author's word choice in this line?** (word choice) *Elliott's use of the word drizzling is interesting. To drizzle is to rain in very small drops; when Elliott uses drizzling as figurative language to show that Dad's anger is slowly disappearing, he is playing with words, because drizzling connects to the rain that is a central element of the story. Something about the imagery of "anger drizzling out" creates feelings of relief, happiness, and peace at the end of a story that started out with pummeling rain, noise, and chaos.*
6. **Consider this line: "'Lukas was just teaching me about rain,' I replied, giving my brother a wink." What does Lukas teach Mylo about the rain? How does he teach him? Finally, why do you think Mylo winks at Lukas?** (inference) *Lukas teaches Mylo what's so great about rain. After Mylo asks Lukas why he likes the rain so much, Lukas doesn't reply. Verbally explaining why he likes rain could never make Mylo understand him in the way that grabbing Mylo's hands, pulling him to his feet, and getting him to dance in it can. This act makes the boys feel happy, free, and alive, and like all negativity and challenges have been washed away. Perhaps Mylo winks at Lukas as a sign of affection or gratitude for the experience they just shared. Or perhaps Mylo, after giving their dad this response to quickly diffuse his concern and anger, winks at Lukas in a knowing way, as if to say "We can keep the rest of the story just between us."*
7. **What character traits would you use to describe Mylo?** (character) *Answers will vary but might include compassionate, caring, understanding, considerate, unselfish and sympathetic.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete the **Character Thinking Tool**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 29 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Other *Scope* articles from the online library about sibling relationships:

- Fiction In a Flash: "[Climbing Skull Mountain](#)" (October 2019)
- Fiction: "[Home](#)" (September 2020)
- Fiction In a Flash: "[The Roach](#)" (March 2020)