

Dear Future

A beautiful story about getting through life's challenging times

About the Story

Lexile: 740L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to write a journal entry from the point of view of the main character in a work of fiction

Key Skills: mood, theme, author's craft, inference, narrative writing, character

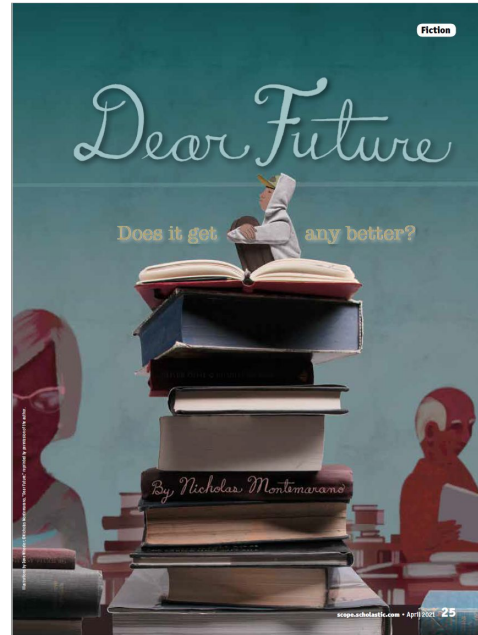
Essential Questions:

- What brings meaning into our lives?
- How do we get through difficult times?
- How does life change from childhood to adulthood?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.3, W.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
- Vocabulary
- Text-to-speech

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- Poem: "Advice For Eighth Grade"
- Fiction: "Thirteen and a Half"
- Poem: "On Turning 10"

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

- Preparing to Write: James's Journal
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- **Core Skill Workout:** Inference
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

10 minutes

Do-Now: Respond to a Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

- Give students five minutes to respond to the following questions in their class journals or on a piece of paper: *Do you think it's possible to be happy all the time? Would you want to be happy all the time?* Then invite volunteers to share any part of what they wrote.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard, or if you're remote, share it on your screen. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *blanch, detach, grisly, minuscule, musty, rummage*

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a student read the As You Read box on page 26 or at the top of the digital story page.
- Point out the directions at the top of the column on the far right side of page 27 and read them aloud to your students.
- Read the story once through as a class. Optionally, have students listen to the author read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the story again, pausing to discuss the close-reading questions that appear in the margins of the print magazine or by clicking on the bolded text on the digital story page. Have students record their answers in the margins or on the **Close-Reading Questions activity**. *Tip: If you're remote, you can have each group respond in a shared doc or discuss the questions in their own chat rooms.*

Close-Reading Questions

(15 minutes)

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

- 1. How does the setting help create the mood at the beginning of the story? (mood)** *At the beginning of the story, the setting helps create a gloomy and pessimistic mood. The church basement where a used-book sale is being held is “cold” and “musty”—in other words, it’s a place with an uncomfortable temperature, an unpleasant smell, and where it is likely dark or perhaps illuminated by harsh fluorescent lights. The books are described as being unorganized and worn out: James calls them “beat up” and notes that some of them fall apart in his hands.*
- 2. Consider what James says about “The Night.” How does what he says help develop the big ideas of “Dear Future”? (theme)** *James says that the boy in “The Night” realizes that someday something won’t turn out all right. James also says that the story seems to be about the end of childhood, and that this makes him feel something he can’t name—but which you can infer is an uncomfortable feeling. The situations and ideas in “The Night” that James mentions mirror what James himself is dealing with: He is worried about the future and anxious about reaching the end of childhood. Both of these ideas are further developed throughout “Dear Future,” such as when James asks Annie if things got better for her, when James asks his parents if happiness decreases as you get older, and when James’s mom says that she once thought that being 13 meant not being a kid anymore and she wasn’t ready for that.*
- 3. Describe how the author creates rhythm in these lines. How does this rhythm help reveal James’s emotions? (author’s craft)** *The author creates rhythm by using a repeating structure with variations. First, he presents two one-sentence paragraphs with exactly the same structure: “My [x] question is:” followed by the question. Then he combines three questions in the same paragraph. For the sixth question, he returns to the structure of “My [x] question is:” and then finally, he uses a related structure to provide an answer (“The answer to my sixth question is . . .”). The rhythm the author creates helps you understand James’s excitement and curiosity. You sense that questions are popping into his mind in quick succession. When the author puts the third, fourth, and fifth questions together, it’s like the questions are coming so fast that they’re almost overlapping. The change of structure in the final line signals a change in James—you understand that he is now going to stop wondering and take action.*
- 4. What has made James’s day better, and how? (inference)** *Finding Annie’s journal and then talking to her has made James’s day better. The journal was interesting and unexpected, but more than that, you can infer that it made James feel understood. When Annie wrote it, she was going through a hard time, just as James is going through a hard time now. Talking to Annie has made James’s day even better, because it has given him hope and perspective: Annie says that she is now “happy enough,” and she also says that 13 seems like a long time ago—which probably makes James realize that someday, the things he is currently struggling with may seem far in the past.*

5. **Why does Mom say this? What does it connect to earlier in the story?** (inference) Mom likely says this to let James know that she understands that he is having a difficult time and that she can relate to his experience. Her comment connects to what James said earlier about the Ray Bradbury story “The Night”: that it seems to be about a boy coming to the end of his childhood, which makes James feel something he “can’t name.”
 6. **What do you think James wants to remember and miss about this day?** (theme) Students may answer that James wants to remember and miss the unexpected joy of connecting with a stranger and how that experience, along with talking to his parents, gave him hope about the future. He may also want to remember and miss the connection he felt with his parents today. He heard his mom say that she too was full of uncertainty at his age and that James and his dad have brought more meaning to her life than anything else. He heard his dad say that what matters in life is how you get through hard times and who you get through them with, followed by a smile that let James know how much his dad values him and his mom.
- As a class, discuss the following questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Why do you think Annie started her journal entries “Dear Future” and signed them “The Past”?** Answers will vary. One idea is that Annie found it comforting to think about herself in the future, when the things she was currently struggling with would be behind her.
2. **In your own words, explain what you think James’s parents mean by what they tell him at the end of the story. Do you agree with them?** When James’s mom says that happiness is hard to measure, she might mean that everyone has a different definition of happiness, or that there is more than one kind of happiness. For example, you might feel happy when you get a new pair of sneakers or while you’re watching a funny video, but that sort of happiness isn’t very deep—it’s not what will give you a true feeling of contentment. James’s mom also suggests that what we should seek in life isn’t so much happiness as it is meaning. When she tells James that nothing has brought more meaning to her life than James and his dad, she is saying that the most important thing in life is the people you love. James’s dad means that rather than wishing for an easy life, you should focus on how you deal with whatever happens. He also suggests, like James’s mom, that what brings true happiness or meaning to life is relationships with other people. (Answers will vary.)
3. **What do you think it means to “not be a kid anymore”? What do you think the main differences are between being a kid and being an adult?** Answers will vary.

- As a class, read the informational text “How to Keep a Journal,” or give students time to read it independently. After reading, ask any volunteers who keep journals to share their approach to journaling and any tips they would add to what is in the article.

3. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: James’s Journal**. This activity will help students 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.

Connected readings from the *Scope* archives:

Poem: “[Advice for Eighth Grade](#)” (May 2020)

Fiction: “[Thirteen and a Half](#)” (November 2018)

Poem: “[On Turning 10](#)” (November 2018)