

LESSON 1

TALES THAT CAPTIVATE: AN INTRODUCTION TO SHORT STORIES





Path to Understanding

Hey, class! Have you ever heard a story so short yet meaningful that it sticks with you? That's exactly what a short story is! It's a quick narrative that focuses on a problem or conflict and teaches something important. Think of it as a tiny slice of life full of flavor!

Short stories are like snapshots of life. They give us a peek into other people's experiences, emotions, and lessons. In the Philippines, our short stories are treasures that reflect who we are—our culture, values, and traditions. They're entertaining, but they also teach us a lot about life.

Let's discuss "My Father Goes to Court" by Carlos Bulosan. It's a funny and clever story about a father who uses wit to protect his family. The story shows the strength and humor that Filipinos are known for.

Key Concept Unveiled!

Prose and poetry are two different styles of writing. Prose is written in sentences and paragraphs, like what we see in stories, essays, or textbooks. It uses everyday language and is meant to explain or tell something clearly. On the other hand, poetry is written in lines and stanzas, often with rhythm or rhyme. It uses creative and imaginative language to express feelings, ideas, or paint pictures in the reader's mind. While prose is straightforward and similar to regular speech, poetry is more artistic, like singing with words. Both are important ways of sharing thoughts and stories, but they do it in unique ways.

My Father Goes To Court **By Carlos Bulosan**

When I was four, I lived with my mother and brothers and sisters in a small town on the island of Luzon. Father's farm had been destroyed in 1918 by one of our sudden Philippine floods, so for several years afterward we all lived in the town, though he preferred living in the country. We had a next-door neighbor, a wealthy man, whose sons and daughters seldom¹ came out of the house. While we boys and girls played under the sun, his children stayed inside and kept the windows closed. His home was so tall that his children could look in the windows of our house and watch us as we played, slept, or ate, when there was any food in the house to eat.

Now, this rich man's servants were constantly frying and cooking something good, and the aroma of the food wafted² down to us from the windows of the big house. We hung about and took all the wonderful smell of the food into our minds. Sometimes, in the morning, our whole family stood outside the windows of the rich man's house and listened to the musical sizzling of thick strips of bacon or ham. I can remember one afternoon when our neighbor's servants roasted three chickens. The chickens were young and tender and the fat that dripped into the burning coals gave off an enchanting³ odor. We watched the servants turn the beautiful birds and inhaled the heavenly spirit that drifted⁴ toward us.

Some days the rich man appeared at a window and glowered⁵ down at us. He looked at us individually, as though he were condemning⁶ us. We were all healthy because we went out in the sun daily and bathed in the cool river water flowing from the mountains into the sea. Sometimes we wrestled⁷ with one another in the house before we went out to play.

We were always in the best of spirits and our laughter was contagious⁸. Other neighbors who passed by our house often stopped in our yard and joined us in our laughter. Laughter was our only wealth. Father was a laughing man. He would go into the living room and stand in front of the tall mirror, stretching⁹ his mouth into grotesque¹⁰ shapes with his fingers and making faces at himself, and then he would rush into the kitchen, roaring with laughter.

There was plenty to make us laugh. There was, for instance, the day one of my brothers came home and brought a small bundle under his arm, pretending that he got something to eat, maybe a leg of lamb or something as extravagant¹¹ as that to make our mouths water. He rushed to the mother and threw the bundle into her lap. We all stood around, watching mother undo the complicated strings. Suddenly a black cat leaped out of the bundle and ran wildly around the house. Mother chased my brother and beat him with her little fists, while the rest of us bent double, choking¹² with laughter.

Another time one of my sisters suddenly started screaming in the middle of the night. Mother reached out to her first and tried to calm her. My sister cried and groaned¹³. When father lifted the lamp, my sister stared at us with shame.

"What is it?" another asked.

"I'm pregnant!" she cried.

"Don't be a fool!" Father shouted.

"You're only a child," Mother said.

"I'm pregnant, I'll tell you!" she cried.

Father knelt by my sister. He put his hand on her belly and rubbed it gently. "How do you know you are pregnant?" he asked.

"Feel it!" she cried.

We put our hands on her belly. Something was moving inside. Father was frightened¹⁴. Mother was shocked. "Who's the man?" she asked.

"There's no man," my sister said. "What is it then?" Father asked.

Suddenly, my sister opened her blouse, and a bullfrog¹⁵ jumped out. My mother fainted, my father dropped the lamp, the oil spilled on the floor, and my sister's blanket caught fire. One of my brothers laughed so hard he rolled on the floor.

When the fire was extinguished¹⁶, Mother was revived, and we turned to bed and tried to sleep, but Father kept on laughing so loud we could not sleep anymore. Mother got up again and lit the oil lamp; we rolled up the mats on the floor and began dancing and laughing with all our might. We made so much noise that all our neighbors except the wealthy family came into the yard and joined us in loud, genuine¹⁷ laughter.

It was like that for years.

As time passed, the rich man's children became thin and anemic, while we grew even more robust and full of fire. Our faces were bright and rosy, but theirs were pale and sad. The rich man started to cough at night; then coughed day and night. His wife began coughing too. Then the children started to cough one after the other. At night their coughing sounded like the barking of a herd¹⁸ of seals¹⁹. We hung outside their windows and listened to them. We wondered what had happened to them. We knew they were not sick from lacking nourishing food because they constantly fried something delicious.

One day, the rich man appeared at a window and stood there for a long time. He looked at my sisters, who had grown fat while laughing, then at my brothers, whose arms and legs were like the molave, the sturdiest²⁰ tree in the Philippines. He banged²¹ down the window and ran through the house, shutting all the windows.

Our neighbor's house windows were closed from that day on, and the children no longer came outdoors. However, we could still hear the servants cooking in the kitchen, and no matter how tightly the windows were shut, the aroma of the food came to us in the wind and drifted gratuitously²² into our house.

One morning a policeman from the presidencia²³ came to our house with a sealed piece of paper. The rich man had filed a complaint against us. Father took me with him when he went to the town clerk and asked about it. He told Father the man claimed that we had been stealing the spirit of his wealth and food for years.

When the day came for us to appear in court, Father brushed his old army uniform and borrowed a pair of shoes from one of my brothers. We were the first to arrive. Father sat on a chair in the center of the courtroom. Mother occupied a chair by the door. We children sat on an extended bench by the wall. Father kept jumping up in his chair and stabbing the air with his arms, as though he were defending himself before an imaginary jury²⁴.

The rich man arrived. He had grown old and feeble²⁵; his face was scarred with deep lines. With him was his young lawyer. Spectators²⁶ came in and almost filled the chairs. The judge entered the room and sat on a high chair. We stood up in a hurry and sat down again.

After the courtroom preliminaries, the judge took a father. "Do you have a lawyer?" he asked. "I don't need a lawyer judge." He said.

"Proceed," said the judge.

The rich man's lawyer jumped and pointed his finger at Father, "Do you or do you not agree that you have been stealing the spirit of the complainant's wealth and food?"

"I do not!" Father said.

“Do you or do you not agree that while the complainant’s servants cooked and fried fat legs of lambs and young chicken breasts, you and your family hung outside your windows and inhaled the heavenly spirit of the food?”

“I agree,” Father said.

“How do you account for that?”

Father got up and paced around, scratching his head thoughtfully. Then he said, “I would like to see the complainant’s children, Judge.”

“Bring the children of the complainant.”

They came shyly. The spectators covered their mouths with their hands. They were so amazed to see the children so thin and pale. The children walked silently to a bench and sat down without looking up. They stared at the floor and moved their hands uneasily.

Father could not say anything at first. He just stood by his chair and looked at them. Finally he said, “I would like to cross-examine the complainant²⁷.”

“Proceed.”

“Do you claim that we stole the spirit of your wealth and beca

me a laughing family while yours became morose²⁸ and sad?” Father asked.

“Yes.”

“Then we are going to pay you right now,” Father said. He walked over to where we children were sitting on the bench, took my straw hat off my lap, and began filling it up with centavo pieces he had taken out of his pockets. He went to Mother, who added a fistful of silver coins. My brothers threw in their small change.

“May I walk to the room across the hall and stay there for a minute, Judge?” Father asked. “As you wish.”

“Thank you,” Father said. He strode into the other room with the hat in his hands. It was almost full of coins. The doors of both rooms were wide open.

“Are you ready?” Father called. “Proceed.” The judge said.

The sweet tinkle²⁹ of coins carried beautifully into the room. The spectators turned their faces toward the sound with wonder. Father came back and stood before the complainant.

Key concept Unveiled!

Key elements of Filipino culture and characteristics in the story:

1. Family Unity and Togetherness.

The story highlights the strong bond within the narrator’s family, who live, laugh, and face challenges together. This reflects the deep value Filipinos place on family unity, or “pagkakaisa.” Their shared experiences and laughter, even in poverty, emphasize the importance of emotional support and joy in Filipino households.

2. Resilience and Optimism.

Despite their poverty, the family remains resilient and optimistic, finding joy in simple things like the aroma of food from a neighbor’s house. Their laughter symbolizes their strength, showcasing the typical Filipino trait of coping with hardships through humor and a positive outlook.

“Did you hear it?” he asked. “Hear what?” the man asked.

“The spirit of the money when I shook this hat?” he asked. “Yes.”

“Then you are paid,” Father said.

The rich man opened his mouth to speak and fell to the floor without a sound. The lawyer rushed to his aid. The judge pounded his gavel.

“Case dismissed,” he said.

Father strutted³⁰ around the courtroom. The judge even reached his high chair to shake hands with him. “By the way,” he whispered, “I had an uncle who died laughing.”

“You like to hear my family laugh, judge?” Father asked.

“Why not?”

“Did you hear that, children?” Father said.

My sister started it. The rest of us followed them, and soon, the spectators laughed with us, holding their bellies and bending over the chairs. And the laughter of the judge was the loudest of all.



Word Wizard – Power Up Your Vocabulary

¹**Seldom** – Rarely or infrequently occurring.

²**Wafted** – Moved gently through the air, often carried by the wind.

³**Enchanting** – Delightfully charming or captivating.

⁴**Drifted** – Moved slowly and effortlessly in a direction, often without control.

⁵**Glowered** – Looked at someone or something with an angry or sullen expression.

⁶**Condemning** – Expressing strong disapproval or sentencing someone to punishment.

⁷**Wrestled** – Struggled physically or mentally with something or someone.

⁸**Contagious** – Capable of spreading from one person to another, often used for diseases.

⁹**Stretching** – Extending or pulling something to make it longer or more flexible.

¹⁰**Grotesque** – Distorted or unnatural in appearance, often shocking or ugly.

¹¹**Extravagant** – Excessively lavish, costly, or over-the-top in style or spending.

¹²**Choking** – Having difficulty breathing due to obstruction in the throat or airway.

¹³**Groaned** – Made a deep, low sound expressing pain, discomfort, or frustration.

¹⁴**Frightened** – Feeling fear or anxiety due to a perceived threat or danger.

¹⁵**Bullfrog** – A large, deep-voiced frog found in North America.

¹⁶**Extinguished** – Put out or ended something, such as a fire or a light.

¹⁷**Genuine** – Authentic, real, or sincere.

¹⁸**Herd** – A group of animals that live or move together, often led by a dominant member.

¹⁹**Seals** – Aquatic marine mammals with streamlined bodies and flippers.

²⁰**Sturdiest** – The strongest or most durable in structure.

²¹**Banged** – Hit something forcefully, causing a loud noise.

²²**Gratuitously** – Done without reason, justification, or necessity.

²³**Presidencia** – A Spanish term for the office or residence of a president.

²⁴**Jury** – Group of people sworn to decide a case in a court of law based on evidence presented.

²⁵**Feeble** – Weak, lacking physical or mental strength. Trivia Time– About The Author Carlos Bulosan, born in Pangasinan in 1913, was a Filipino-American writer, poet, and activist whose works are vital to Philippine literature and immigrant narratives. Migrating to the United States for better opportunities, he faced racism, poverty, and exploitation, which shaped the themes of his writings. His notable works, *America is in the Heart* and *My Father Goes to Court*, highlight Filipino immigrants' resilience, dignity, and struggles while celebrating Filipino culture. Bulosan used writing to stay connected to his roots, advocating for justice and equality. His legacy bridges Filipino heritage with global issues of migration and identity. Writing was his way of staying connected to his roots! If you'd like to learn more about Carlos Bulosan's biography and works, please check out this link: <https://poets.org/poet/carlos-bulosan>.

²⁶**Spectators** – People who watch an event, especially a sports match or performance.

²⁷**Complainant** – A person who makes a formal accusation or files a lawsuit.

²⁸**Morose** – Gloomy, sullen, or ill-tempered.

²⁹**Tinkle** – A light, ringing sound, often associated with small bells or falling water.

³⁰**Strutted** – Walked in a confident, arrogant, or showy manner.

With the story still fresh in your mind, it's the perfect moment to dig deeper. These questions will help you uncover hidden meanings and sharpen your comprehension.



Extend Your Learning!

Savoring the Spirit: A Story of Family, Contentment, and True Wealth

Instructions: Re-read the story carefully and respond to each comprehension question. Provide clear, concise, and well-supported answers using evidence from the text. Each question is worth 2 points.

1. What was the main problem between the narrator's family and the rich neighbor?
2. Why did the rich man file a complaint against the narrator's family?
3. How did the narrator's family respond to the complaint?
4. What do you think the "spirit of the food" means in this story?
5. Why do you think the narrator's family was healthier and happier than the rich man's family?
6. How would you describe the narrator's father? Give examples from the story.
7. Do you think the narrator's family stole something from the rich man? Why or why not?
8. What is the difference between the rich man's idea of wealth and the narrator's family's idea of wealth?
9. What do you think was the author's message or moral of the story?

That was a challenging question, and you handled it so well. Let's keep that momentum going!

Trivia Time– About The Author

Carlos Bulosan, born in Pangasinan in 1913, was a Filipino-American writer, poet, and activist whose works are vital to Philippine literature and immigrant narratives. Migrating to the United States for better opportunities, he faced racism, poverty, and exploitation, which shaped the themes of his writings. His notable works, *America is in the Heart* and *My Father Goes to Court*, highlight Filipino immigrants' resilience, dignity, and struggles while celebrating Filipino culture. Bulosan used writing to stay connected to his roots, advocating for justice and equality. His legacy bridges Filipino heritage with global issues of migration and identity. Writing was his way of staying connected to his roots!

If you'd like to learn more about Carlos Bulosan's biography and works, please check out this link:
<https://poets.org/poet/carlos-bulosan>.

