

from *A Gift of Laughter*

by Allan Sherman

“DaddydaddyDADDY!” That’s how it came out—one long, excited word. He started yelling it at the top of the stairs, and by the time he bounded into the living room he really had it going good. I’d been talking to his mother about a money problem, and it stopped me mid-sentence.

“Robbie, *please!*” I said. Then I **appealed** to my wife. “Can’t we have just five minutes around here without kids screaming?”

Robbie had been holding something behind his back. Now he swung it around for me to see. “Daddy, *look!*”

It was a picture, drawn in the messy crayon of a seven-year-old. It showed a weird-looking creature with one ear three times as big as the other, one green eye and one red; the head was pear-shaped, and the face needed a shave.

I turned on my son. “Is *that* what you interrupted me for? Couldn’t you wait? I’m talking to your mother about something *important!*” **1**

His face clouded up. His eyes filled with **bewilderment**, rage, then tears. “Awright!” he screamed, and threw the picture to the floor. “But it’s *your* birthday Saturday!” Then he ran upstairs.

Practice the Skills

1 Comparing Literature

Tone What is Sherman’s attitude here? How can you tell? Make notes on your chart to tell what you know about Sherman so far.

Vocabulary

appealed (uh PEELD) *v.* made a serious request

bewilderment (bih WIL dur munt) *n.* confusion

I looked at the picture on the floor. At the bottom, in Robbie's careful printing, were some words I hadn't noticed: MY DAD by Robert Sherman.

Just then Robbie slammed the door of his room. But I heard a different door, a door I once slammed—25 years ago—in my grandmother's house in Chicago.

It was the day I heard my grandmother say she needed a *football*. I heard her tell my mother there was going to be a party tonight for the whole family, and she had to have a football, for after supper.

I couldn't imagine *why* Grandmother needed a football. I was sure she wasn't going to play the game with my aunts and uncles.

She had been in America only a few years, and still spoke with a deep Yiddish accent. But Grandma wanted a football, and a football was something in *my* department. If I could get one, I'd be important, a contributor to the party. I slipped out the door.

There were only three footballs in the neighborhood, and they belonged to older kids. Homer Spicer wasn't home. Eddie Polonsky wouldn't sell or rent, at any price.

The last possibility was a tough kid we called Gudgie. It was just as I'd feared. Gudgie punched me in the nose. Then he said he would trade me his old football for my new sled, plus all the marbles I owned.

I filled Gudgie's football with air at the gas station. Then I sneaked it into the house and shined it with shoe polish. When I finished, it was a football worthy of Grandmother's party. All the aunts and uncles would be proud. When nobody was looking I put it on the dining-room table. Then I waited in my room for Grandma to notice it. 2

But it was Mother who noticed it. "Allan!" she shouted. I ran to the dining room.



Analyzing the Photo Can a photographer express a tone, or attitude, in a picture? Can you describe the photographer's tone in this picture? Explain.

Practice the Skills

2 Comparing Literature

Tone Here Sherman is talking about himself as a child. What words and phrases show you that, as a kid, Allan was eager to please his family? Record your answers on your chart.

"You know your grandmother's giving a party tonight. Why can't you put your things where they belong?"

"It's not mine," I protested.

"Then give it back to whoever it belongs to. Get it out of here!"

"But it's for Grandma! She said she needed a football for the party." I was holding back the tears.

Mother burst into laughter. "A *football* for the party! Don't you understand your own grandma?" Then, between peals of laughter, Mother explained: "Not football. Fruit bowl! Grandma needs a fruit bowl for the party." 3

I was starting to cry, so I ran to my room and slammed the door. The worst part of crying was trying to stop. I can still feel it—the shuddering, my breath coming in little, **staccato** jerks. 4 And each sputtery breath brought back the pain, the frustration, the unwanted feeling that had made me cry in the first place. I was still trying to stop crying when the aunts and uncles arrived. I heard their voices (sounding very far away), and the clink-clink of Grandma's good china, and now and then an explosion of laughter.

After dinner, Mother came in. "Allan," she said, "come with me. I want you to see something." I followed her into the living room.

Grandma was walking around the room like a queen, holding out to each of the aunts and uncles the biggest, most magnificent cut-glass bowl I'd ever seen. There were grapes and bananas in it, red apples, figs and tangerines. And in the center of the bowl, all shiny and brown, was Gudgie's football.

Just then my Uncle Sol offered Grandma a compliment.¹

"Esther," he said, "that's a beautiful *football*. Real *cott gless*."

Grandma looked at Uncle Sol with great superiority. "Sol," she said, "listen close, you'll learn something. This *cott gless* is called a *frutt boll*, not a *football*. This in the middle, *this* is a *football*."

Uncle Sol was impressed. "Very smot,"² he said. "Very nice. But, Esther, now tell me something. How come you got a *football* in your *frutt boll*?" He pronounced them both very carefully.

"Because," Grandma said, "today mine Allan brought me a nice present, this football. It's beautiful, no?"

Practice the Skills

3 Comparing Literature

Tone The tone changes at this point. How would you describe Mother's tone? Why?

4 English Language Coach

Context Clue Review The writer uses the word **staccato** to describe his breath. Look at the context clues in the sentence: *shuddering, little, and jerks*. What do you think *staccato* means?

1. A **compliment** is an expression of admiration or respect.

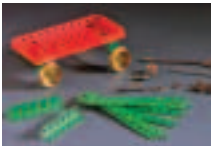
2. The author is writing the words so that you can hear how they sound. Uncle Sol is saying the word *smart*. With his accent, it sounds like **smot**.

Before Uncle Sol could answer, Grandma continued, "It's beautiful, yess—because from a child is beautiful, anything." 5
... From a child is beautiful, anything.

I picked up Robbie's picture from the floor. It wasn't bad, at that. One of my ears *is* a little bigger than the other. And usually, when Robbie sees me at the end of the day, I *do* need a shave.

I went up to his room. "Hi, Rob," I said.

His breath was shuddering, and his nose was running. He



Visual Vocabulary
 An **erector set** is a building toy made of small parts.

was packing a cardboard box, as he always does when he Leaves Home. I held up the picture. "Say, I've been looking this over. It's very good."

"I don't care," he said. He threw a comic book into the box and some Erector-set pieces. "Tear it up if you want to. I can't draw, anyhow."

He put on his cap and jacket, picked up the box and walked right past me. I followed him with the picture in my hand. 6

When he got to the front door, he just stood there, his hand on the knob, the way he always does. I suppose he thinks of the same things I used to, whenever I Left Home. You stand there by the door, and pray *they* won't let you go, because you have no place to go, and if *they* don't want you, who does?

I got my coat and joined him. "Come on," I said. "I'm going with you." And I took him by the hand.

He looked up at me, very scared. "Where we going?"

"The shopping center is open tonight," I said. "We're going to buy a frame for this picture. It's a beautiful picture. We'll hang it in the living room. After we get the frame we're going to have an ice-cream soda and I'll tell you about something."

"About what?"

"Well, you remember that old football your great-grandma keeps in the cut-glass bowl on her dining-room table?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to tell you how she got it." 7 ○



Practice the Skills

5 Comparing Literature

Tone Sherman's grandma says his present is beautiful. How does this make him feel? What words and phrases tell you that this is a positive memory for him? Explain your answers on your chart.

6 Comparing Literature

Tone What words and phrases does Sherman use to show that his attitude—and his tone—toward Robbie has changed? On your chart, make notes about the tone here.

7 BIG Question

Sherman learned that every child's gift is valuable. What did you learn from reading this selection? Write your answer on the *Gift of Laughter* page of Foldable 1. Your response will help you complete the Unit Challenge later.

Before You Read

A Family Thing *and* Knoxville, Tennessee

Meet the Authors



Jerry Spinelli

Jerry Spinelli was born in Norristown, Pennsylvania, in 1941. He has written more than 20 books. "A Family Thing" is a chapter from his autobiography *Knots in My Yo-yo String*.



Nikki Giovanni

Nikki Giovanni was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1943. She grew up in Ohio but spent many summers in Tennessee. Giovanni has written more than 24 books. She is committed to fighting for civil rights and equality.



Author Search For more about Jerry Spinelli and Nikki Giovanni, go to www.glencoe.com.

Objectives (pp. 123–129)

Reading Compare and contrast across texts: tone

Vocabulary Use context clues

Vocabulary Preview

procedure (pro SEE jur) *n.* series of steps taken to do something (p. 124)

The students followed a safety procedure when the fire alarm went off.

recollections (rek uh LEK shunz) *n.* memories (p. 125)

Arnie's grandfather shared his recollections of the past.

eclipsed (ee KLIPSD) *v.* made to seem unimportant; form of the verb

eclipse (p. 127) *The team won the state championship and eclipsed its earlier losses.*

English Language Coach

Context Clue Review As you read, find the words below in "A Family Thing." Use context clues to understand their meanings. Remember to read the whole paragraph—and not just the sentence—as you hunt for context clues.

- triptych
- gauge

Get Ready to Read

Connect to the Reading

The authors of these selections write about places they love. Is there a place you love to go? Why is it meaningful to you? Write your answer in your Learner's Notebook.

Build Background

- The essay talks about holidays in the Spinelli household.
- The poem describes summers in Knoxville, Tennessee.
- Both the essay and the poem describe childhood memories.

Set Purposes for Reading

BIG Question Read "A Family Thing" and "Knoxville, Tennessee" to find out what the authors remember about the great family, food, and friends they had growing up.

Set Your Own Purpose What else would you like to learn from the story and poem to help you answer the Big Question? Write your own purpose on the "A Family Thing" and "Knoxville, Tennessee" page of Foldable 1.



A Family Thing

by Jerry Spinelli

On the night of May 16, 1936, my mother and father got married. This was three years after Lou Spinelli, nicknamed Poppy, had spotted pretty, dark-haired Lorna Bigler on the dance floor at the Orioles Lodge and said to his friend Babe Richards, “See that girl. That’s who I’m going to marry.” On the night of their wedding, they were on another dance floor, at the Little Ritz, a nightspot on Route 202 north of town. They were broke, so this was all the honeymoon they would have. **1**

At one point during the evening an announcement was made: A contest would determine the prettiest lady in attendance. My mother doesn’t recall the contest **procedure**, only the result. The winner was the new Mrs. Lou Spinelli. Her prize was a gift certificate to have her portrait done at the Davis Photography Studio.

Four and a half years later, on February 1, 1941, I was born. My brother, Bill, came along four and a half years after that, on July 29, 1945. My mother’s wedding-day prize, the framed

Practice the Skills

1 Comparing Literature

Tone The author, Jerry Spinelli, begins with a story about his parents. Look at the words Spinelli has chosen and the details he includes. What’s the tone of this part of the essay? Write your answer on your chart.

Vocabulary

procedure (pro SEE jur) *n.* series of steps taken to do something

portrait from Davis Studio, stands today on her bedroom dresser, the center of a **trptych** flanked by photo portraits of toddlers Bill and me. 2

Mothers can get short-changed by memory. My **recollections**, for example, begin somewhere in my third year. By then some of my best experiences with my mother, some three years' worth of constant daily interaction, were already over. When my mind's recorder finally turned on, it was moments with my



Visual Vocabulary
A **crèche** (kresh) is a representation of Jesus's birth in a stable.

father that made the more memorable impressions: trips to high school ball games, backyard baseball, setting up the Christmas crèche. My mother's attentions continued, of course, but they tended to be less obvious, less noticed. They were the background of my life, the everyday care and support that at last came into full recognition when I acquired a family of my own.

The marriage of Louis Anthony Spinelli and Lorna Mae Bigler brought together two heritages: Italian (my father) and Pennsylvania Dutch (my mother).

When I think of my Italian side, I think first of Sundays after church. The four of us would walk—or after 1954, when we got our first car, ride—the four blocks from First Presbyterian to my grandparents' home at 226 Chestnut. It was a row house with porches front and back and a rose arbor and dark polished furniture that made the living and dining rooms feel gloomy to me. The kitchen was where the light and the people and the food were.

Around the kitchen table sat aunts and uncles and cousins and, always at the head, my grandfather, Alessandro "Alex" Spinelli. In front of him was a small glass pitcher of red wine. Before each meal, including breakfast of cold spaghetti, he drew the wine from his own barrel in the cellar. He was bald and he did not speak English very well and his breath always smelled of garlic and he smoked thin black wicked stogies and his fingers were as thick as sausages. He had labored many years for the Pennsylvania Department of Highways. Later the Borough of Norristown employed him as a street

Practice the Skills

2 English Language Coach

Context Clue Review What is a **trptych**? Use context clues to write a definition. (Hint: How many pictures are on the dresser?)

Vocabulary

recollections (rek uh LEK shunz) *n.* memories

sweeper. Sometimes, riding my bike, I would see him with other old men, pushing a broom along a curb.

That was his job. His love was the “farm,” a small patch of vacant land that he rented in the East End. During the growing months, every day after work, he went to the farm to tend his vegetables. I like to think that, as he put hoe to earth, he sometimes reflected on what to me was the remarkable central fact of his life:

“He came over on a boat all by himself when he was only fourteen years old.”

That’s how I say it, even now, when describing my grandfather’s coming to this country. He was an orphan in Italy. He worked in the olive groves around Naples. An aunt arranged for relatives to meet him in New York, handed him a one-way ticket on a steamship, and off he went, across the Atlantic Ocean, a black-haired teenager, alone, *solo*.

Fifty years later I, a nine-year-old American-born boy, sat at his kitchen table, eating the roast chicken with my fingers because that’s how he did it, trying to imagine the bald old man at the head of the table with black hair.

The first course was always salad, as simple as salad gets: lettuce with oil and vinegar. Then came the chicken, then spaghetti and meatballs. My grandmother often made her own spaghetti, rolling out the dough and slicing it into strands with a device that reminded me of a harp. She would spend a whole day nursing the gravy at the stove. (To many Italians, spaghetti sauce is “gravy.”) The dessert was often hot chestnuts, roasted on a second stove in the cellar. 3

As with the Spinellis, a table stands in the center of my memory of the maternal relatives. In this case the table is not in a kitchen but on a sloping lawn under a huge oak tree. Made of planks laid over sawhorses, the table is very long and



Analyzing the Photo How does this image capture the “feel” of Spinelli’s hometown?

Practice the Skills

3 Comparing Literature

Tone Describe Spinelli’s attitude toward the people and food he remembers. Write your answers on your chart.

is crowded with pickled eggs and cold cuts and potato salad and three-bean salad and lemon meringue pie and dozens of other goodies. The place is my Aunt Isabel and Uncle Ted's home in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, about ten miles from Norristown. The occasion is the annual family reunion.

In my early years the reunion was, after Christmas, the biggest event on my calendar. It was the only time I got to see Aunt Lizzie and her gang from Highspire, some eighty miles away. Even their names seemed different. There was a Willard and a Juanita and a second cousin exotically named Kendra. 4

One year there was even more excitement than usual: Uncle Elwood and Aunt Kay drove in from Michigan. I kept staring at my Midwestern cousins Bruce, Janey, and Suzie. They might as well have come from Mars. Alas for Aunt Margaret and Uncle Chet and their kids Cindy, George, JoAnne, and Patty, there was no magic of distance. They lived on Chain Street in Norristown, a mere block and a half from 802 George. I barely noticed them.

As a once-a-year event, the reunion became a **gauge** by which to measure my progress, both physical and social. 5 On the tennis court-size side yard, the uncles always got up a game of softball for the kids. I began as a tiny, grunting fumbler, swinging in vain at the slowest underhand tosses with a bat as big as I was. By the age of ten or eleven, I was clipping the grass with sharp grounders; then line drives to the garage; then, as a seasoned teenage shortstop, long flies into the strawberry patch beyond the trees. But by then the family reunion was no longer number two on my calendar. It had been **eclipsed** by such happenings as school dances and miniature golf with my friends. The year came when I felt myself too big to participate in the softball game. In college, some years, I did not even attend the reunion.

But home—home is a reunion daily. And I never felt too big for Christmas. Christmas was a Bible thing, of course, and a school-vacation thing and a wrapped-presents thing and a homemade-

Practice the Skills

4 Reviewing Skills

Connecting Think about your favorite memory. How would you describe it to someone else? What details would you use to show how you feel about the people, places, and things you're describing?

5 English Language Coach

Context Clue Review What is a **gauge**? Use context clues to write a definition. (Hint: Spinelli says he uses the *gauge* "to measure.")

Analyzing the Photo What does Spinelli remember about the way his grandmother made spaghetti? How are his memories of food and family related?




Vocabulary

eclipsed (ee KLIPSD) *v.* made to seem unimportant

cookies thing—but most of all, as I look back, it was a family thing.

My parents spent almost nothing on themselves. They bought only the clothes they needed. It was a big deal to treat themselves to a milkshake. They never went to the movies. And yet, for all they gave my brother and me, you'd have thought they were rich. My Christmas gifts came in piles. From Lincoln Logs to the inevitable walnut in the toe of my red felt stocking, I accepted the presents strictly as the objects they appeared to be. Only years later did I realize the truth: the gift was my parents' selfless love. **6**

One Christmas morning it bounced lightly off my chest as I came down the stairs, and I looked to see my first football wobbling at my feet. Another year it waited for me in the kitchen. I had unwrapped the last present from under the tree, and my father said, "Well, I guess that's it. Looks like you did pretty good this year." And then someone asked me to go to the kitchen for something, and there it was, in front of the sink: a spanking-new cream and green whitewall-tired Roadmaster bicycle. Love leaning on a kickstand. **7** 



Analyzing the Photo

What does this photograph tell you about the way the Spinellis celebrated Christmas?

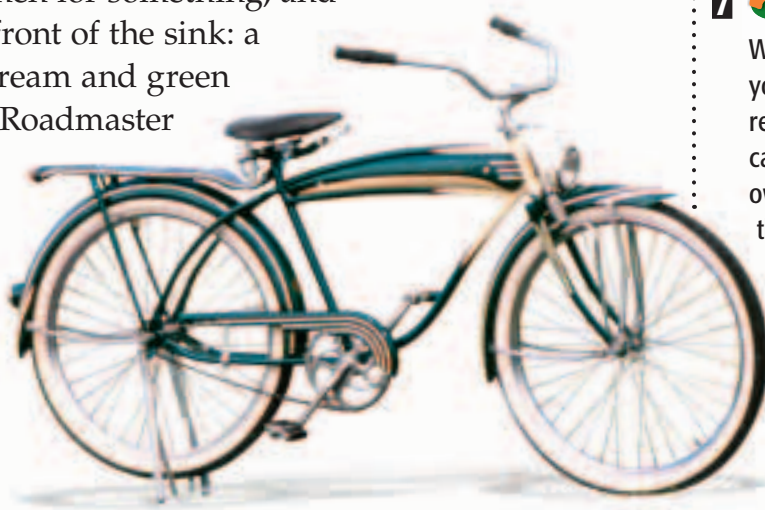
Practice the Skills

6 Comparing Literature

Tone What words and phrases does Spinelli use in this paragraph to show that he loves and respects his parents? What tone do the words and phrases create? Write your answers on your chart.

7 BIG Question

What emotions did you feel as you read "A Family Thing"? Did reading about Spinelli's family cause you to think about your own? Write your answer on the "A Family Thing" page of Foldable 1. Your response will help you complete the Unit Challenge later.



KNOXVILLE,

T E N N E S S E E

by Nikki Giovanni

I always like summer
best
you can eat fresh corn
from daddy's garden
5 and okra*
and greens*
and cabbage*
and lots of
barbecue
10 and buttermilk
and homemade ice-cream
at the church picnic
and listen to
gospel music
15 outside
at the church
homecoming 1
and go to the mountains with
your grandmother
20 and go barefooted
and be warm
all the time
not only when you go to bed
and sleep 2 ○



A Chat in the Road, 1991. Anna Belle Lee Washington. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in.

Practice the Skills

1 Comparing Literature

Tone What is the speaker's attitude toward summer and summer foods? What words and phrases tell you so? Put them on your chart.

2 BIG Question

What did you learn from reading "Knoxville, Tennessee"? Did the poem make you think about the place you come from in a new way? Explain. Write your answers on the "Knoxville, Tennessee" page of Foldable 1.

5, 6, 7 **Okra, greens, and cabbage** are all vegetables commonly eaten in the South.