

*from An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard

## Literary Analysis: Point of View

**Point of view** is the perspective from which a narrative is told. Point of view affects the kinds of details that are revealed to the reader.

- **First-person point of view:** The narrator is a character who participates in the action of the story and tells the story using the words *I* and *me*. The narrator can reveal only his or her own observations, thoughts, and feelings.
- **Third-person point of view:** The narrator is not a character in the story and uses third-person pronouns such as *he*, *she*, and *they* to refer to the characters. The narrator may know and reveal the observations, thoughts, and feelings of more than one person or character in the narrative.

Read this example from *An American Childhood*:

It was a long time before he could speak. I had some difficulty at first recalling why we were there. My lips felt swollen; I couldn't see out of the sides of my eyes; I kept coughing.

You can see from the pronouns *I*, *we*, and *my* that the event is being told from the first-person point of view. The speaker is there—her lips are swollen; her eyes are clouded; she is coughing.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read each quotation from *An American Childhood*. Underline each pronoun that shows that the event is told from the first-person point of view. Then, on the lines that follow, briefly describe what you learned from or about the speaker.

1. Boys welcomed me at baseball, too, for I had, through enthusiastic practice, what was weirdly known as a boy's arm.

**What I learned:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. He ran after us, and we ran away from him, up the snowy Reynolds sidewalk. At the corner, I looked back; incredibly, he was still after us. . . . All of a sudden, we were running for our lives.

**What I learned:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. He chased us silently over picket fences, through thorny hedges, between houses, around garbage cans, and across streets. Every time I glanced back, choking for breath, I expected he would have quit. He must have been as breathless as we were.

**What I learned:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Vocabulary Builder

### Word List

compelled    improvising    perfunctorily    righteous    strategy    translucent

**A. DIRECTIONS:** Think about the meaning of the underlined Word List word in each sentence. Then, answer the question.

1. The children came up with a strategy for throwing snowballs at passing vehicles. Did the children have a plan? How do you know?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. The man compelled Dillard to run through the neighborhood. Did she have a choice? How do you know?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Dillard and Mikey were improvising their escape route as they went along. Had they planned an escape route? How do you know?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. When the man finally caught the kids, he said his words perfunctorily. Did his words hold unique meaning? How do you know?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Dillard describes the man's anger as righteous. Did he believe he was correct to be angry? How do you know?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Dillard's iceball was completely translucent. Could you see light through it? How do you know?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B. WORD STUDY:** The Latin prefix *trans-* means "over," "across," or "through." Words containing the prefix *trans-* include *transfer* ("to move from one place to another") and *translator* ("someone who converts one language to another"). Consider these meanings as you answer each question.

1. Why might you need to *transfer* your records if you change schools?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why might you need a *translator* in a foreign country?  
\_\_\_\_\_