

# The Scarlet Ibis

Short Story by James Hurst

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML9-460

## Why do we **HURT** the ones we **LOVE**?

### COMMON CORE

**RL 1** Cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. **RL 2** Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text. **RL 3** Analyze how complex characters interact with other characters and develop the theme. **L 4a, b** Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word; identify patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings.

Cruelty can intrude on the most loving relationship, often in moments of anger or disappointment. How do you deal with mixed emotions like these? Adults usually control such urges, but children are more likely to act on their immediate feelings. What harm can come from a thoughtless word or action?

**DISCUSS** Sometimes we are harder on loved ones than on anyone else. Why do you think this is? Discuss this question with a small group of your classmates.

Foxtrot BILL AMEND



FOXTROT © 1997 Bill Amend. Reprinted with permission of UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. All rights reserved.

## ● TEXT ANALYSIS: SYMBOL

A **symbol** is a literary device in which a person, animal, place, object, or activity stands for something beyond itself. Writers use symbols to emphasize important ideas and character traits in a story, which can act as clues to the story's **theme**. In "The Scarlet Ibis," for example, a swamp comes to symbolize the love between two brothers. To identify other symbols in this story, use these strategies as you read:

- Look for ideas that the writer emphasizes.
- Note striking images and character descriptions.
- Ask yourself what associations each one brings to mind.

**Review: Mood, Theme**

## ● READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTERS

When you make an **inference**, you make a logical guess based on observations or evidence and on your own knowledge and experience. Sometimes called "reading between the lines," making inferences is an essential step in understanding theme, characters, and the story itself. Use a chart like the one shown to record evidence from the text and your inferences about the relationship between the narrator and his brother.

Quotations and Evidence	Inferences About Relationship
"Doodle . . . was a nice crazy, like someone you meet in your dreams."	Narrator basically liked his brother, but thought he was odd.

## ▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The following boldfaced words are important to understanding "The Scarlet Ibis." To see which words you already know, restate each phrase, using a different word for the boldfaced word.

1. **exotic** flowers from the tropics
2. **reiterate** your idea for emphasis
3. **evanesce**, like smoke into thin air
4. in **imminent** danger of falling
5. claimed **infallibility** in his deeply-held beliefs
6. worked hard and with **doggedness**
7. balanced **precariously** on the edge
8. dangerous beliefs that bordered on **heresy**



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## James Hurst

born 1922

### A Man of Many Talents

James Hurst lives near the North Carolina coast, not far from the farm where he was born. After attending college and serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, he studied singing at New York's famous Juilliard School. Hoping for an operatic career, he also studied in Rome, Italy, but soon gave up on this goal. Then, in 1951, he settled into a long career at a large New York bank.

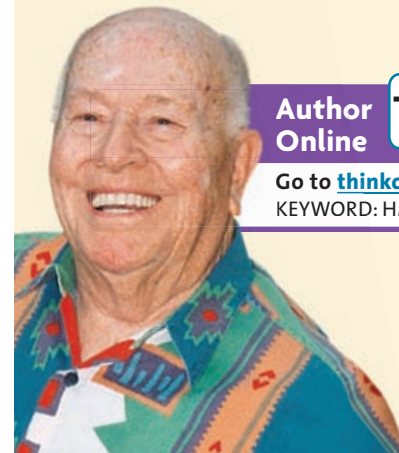
### A Tribute to the Human Spirit

During his early years at the bank, Hurst published short stories and a play. "The Scarlet Ibis" received national attention after appearing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1960 and winning the Atlantic First award that same year. When asked about the meaning of the story, Hurst once replied, "I hesitate to respond, since authors often do not understand what they write. That is why we have critics. I venture to say, however, that it comments on the tenacity and the splendor of the human spirit."

## BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

### Drawn from Nature

"The Scarlet Ibis" takes its title from a tropical bird rarely found in coastal North Carolina, where the story takes place. The lush natural environment of this setting is prominent in the story. In addition to the ibis, Hurst uses the local names of plants for the power of their symbolic associations. For example, the exotic ibis lands in a "bleeding tree," a type of pine that oozes a white sap when cut. "Graveyard flowers" are fragrant white gardenias often planted in cemeteries because they bloom year after year.



Author  
Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML9-461

# The Scarlet Ibis

James Hurst

It was in the clove of seasons,<sup>1</sup> summer was dead but autumn had not yet been born, that the ibis lit in the bleeding tree. The flower garden was stained with rotting brown magnolia petals and ironweeds grew rank amid the purple phlox. The five o'clocks by the chimney still marked time, but the oriole nest in the elm was untenanted and rocked back and forth like an empty cradle. The last graveyard flowers were blooming, and their smell drifted across the cotton field and through every room of our house, speaking softly the names of our dead. **A**

It's strange that all this is still so clear to me, now that that summer has long since fled and time has had its way. A grindstone stands where the bleeding  
10 tree stood, just outside the kitchen door, and now if an oriole sings in the elm, its song seems to die up in the leaves, a silvery dust. The flower garden is prim, the house a gleaming white, and the pale fence across the yard stands straight and spruce. But sometimes (like right now), as I sit in the cool, green-draped parlor, the grindstone begins to turn, and time with all its changes is ground away—and I remember Doodle.

Doodle was just about the craziest brother a boy ever had. Of course, he wasn't a crazy crazy like old Miss Leedie, who was in love with President Wilson and wrote him a letter every day, but was a nice crazy, like someone you meet in your dreams. He was born when I was six and was, from the  
20 outset, a disappointment. He seemed all head, with a tiny body which was red and shriveled like an old man's. Everybody thought he was going to die—everybody except Aunt Nicey, who had delivered him. She said he would live because he was born in a caul,<sup>2</sup> and caul was made from Jesus' nightgown. Daddy had Mr. Heath, the carpenter, build a little mahogany coffin for him. But he didn't die, and when he was three months old, Mama and Daddy decided they might as well name him. They named him William Armstrong, which was like tying a big tail on a small kite. Such a name sounds good only on a tombstone. **B**

## **A** MOOD

What words or images contribute to the mood of sadness and longing in lines 1–7?

## Analyze Visuals ▶

What qualities does the boy in the painting seem to have? Point to details of color, line, shape, and texture to support your answer.

## **B** MAKE INFERENCES

What inferences can you make about Doodle from the **details** offered in this paragraph? Explain your thought process.

1. **the clove of seasons:** a time between two seasons, in this case, summer and autumn.

2. **born in a caul:** born with a thin membrane covering the head.

*Richard at Age Five* (1944), Alice Neel. Oil on canvas, 26" × 14". © Estate of Alice Neel. Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



I thought myself pretty smart at many things, like holding my breath, running, jumping, or climbing the vines in Old Woman Swamp, and I wanted more than anything else someone to race to Horsehead Landing, someone to box with, and someone to perch with in the top fork of the great pine behind the barn, where across the fields and swamps you could see the sea. I wanted a brother. But Mama, crying, told me that even if William Armstrong lived, he would never do these things with me. He might not, she sobbed, even be “all there.” He might, as long as he lived, lie on the rubber sheet in the center of the bed in the front bedroom where the white marquise curtains billowed out in the afternoon sea breeze, rustling like palmetto fronds.<sup>3</sup>

It was bad enough having an invalid brother, but having one who possibly was not all there was unbearable, so I began to make plans to kill him by smothering him with a pillow. However, one afternoon as I watched him, my head poked between the iron posts of the foot of the bed, he looked straight at me and grinned. I skipped through the rooms, down the echoing halls, shouting, “Mama, he smiled. He’s all there! He’s all there!” and he was. **C**

When he was two, if you laid him on his stomach, he began to move himself, straining terribly. The doctor said that with his weak heart this strain would probably kill him, but it didn’t. Trembling, he’d push himself up, turning first red, then a soft purple, and finally collapse back onto the bed like an old worn-out doll. I can still see Mama watching him, her hand pressed tight across her mouth, her eyes wide and unblinking. But he learned to crawl (it was his third winter), and we brought him out of the front bedroom, putting him on the rug before the fireplace. For the first time he became one of us.

As long as he lay all the time in bed, we called him William Armstrong, even though it was formal and sounded as if we were referring to one of our ancestors, but with his creeping around on the deerskin rug and beginning to talk, something had to be done about his name. It was I who renamed him. When he crawled, he crawled backward, as if he were in reverse and couldn’t change gears. If you called him, he’d turn around as if he were going in the other direction, then he’d back right up to you to be picked up. Crawling backward made him look like a doodlebug, so I began to call him Doodle, and in time even Mama and Daddy thought it was a better name than William Armstrong. Only Aunt Nicey disagreed. She said caul babies should be treated with special respect since they might turn out to be saints. Renaming my brother was perhaps the kindest thing I ever did for him, because nobody expects much from someone called Doodle. **D**

Although Doodle learned to crawl, he showed no signs of walking, but he wasn’t idle. He talked so much that we all quit listening to what he said. It was about this time that Daddy built him a go-cart and I had to pull him around.

**C MAKE INFERENCES**

Compare the narrator’s initial reaction to Doodle with his response to Doodle’s grin. What can you infer about the change in the narrator’s attitude?

**D SYMBOL**

Reread lines 60–66. A nickname can sometimes be a kind of symbol. What does Doodle’s nickname tell you about the feelings and expectations others have for him?

3. **palmetto fronds:** the fanlike leaves of a kind of palm tree.



*Cypress Swamp, Texas* (1940), Florence McClung. Oil on masonite, 24" × 30". Gift of the Roger H. Ogden Collection. The Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

70 At first I just paraded him up and down the piazza, but then he started crying to be taken out into the yard, and it ended up by my having to lug him wherever I went. If I so much as picked up my cap, he'd start crying to go with me, and Mama would call from wherever she was, "Take Doodle with you."

He was a burden in many ways. The doctor had said that he mustn't get too excited, too hot, too cold, or too tired and that he must always be treated gently. A long list of don'ts went with him, all of which I ignored once we got out of the house. To discourage his coming with me, I'd run with him across the ends of the cotton rows and careen him around corners on two wheels. Sometimes I accidentally turned him over, but he never told Mama. His skin  
80 was very sensitive, and he had to wear a big straw hat whenever he went out. When the going got rough and he had to cling to the sides of the go-cart, the hat slipped all the way down over his ears. He was a sight. Finally, I could see I was licked. Doodle was my brother and he was going to cling to me forever, no matter what I did, so I dragged him across the burning cotton field to share with him the only beauty I knew, Old Woman Swamp. I pulled the go-cart through the sawtooth fern, down into the green dimness where the palmetto

COMMON CORE L.4a

### Language Coach

#### Word Definitions

Writers sometimes give clues to a word's meaning by placing a definition or example nearby. Reread lines 77–78. What words give you clues to the meaning of *careen*?

fronds whispered by the stream. I lifted him out and set him down in the soft rubber grass beside a tall pine. His eyes were round with wonder as he gazed about him, and his little hands began to stroke the rubber grass. Then he began to cry.

“For heaven’s sake, what’s the matter?” I asked, annoyed.

“It’s so pretty,” he said. “So pretty, pretty, pretty.”

After that day Doodle and I often went down into Old Woman Swamp.

I would gather wildflowers, wild violets, honeysuckle, yellow jasmine, snakeflowers, and water lilies, and with wire grass we’d weave them into necklaces and crowns. We’d bedeck ourselves with our handiwork and loll about thus beautified, beyond the touch of the everyday world. Then when the slanted rays of the sun burned orange in the tops of the pines, we’d drop our jewels into the stream and watch them float away toward the sea. **E**

100 There is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others) a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love, much as our blood sometimes bears the seed of our destruction, and at times I was mean to Doodle. One day I took **F** him up to the barn loft and showed him his casket, telling him how we all had believed he would die. It was covered with a film of Paris green<sup>4</sup> sprinkled to kill the rats, and screech owls had built a nest inside it.

Doodle studied the mahogany box for a long time, then said, “It’s not mine.”

“It is,” I said. “And before I’ll help you down from the loft, you’re going to have to touch it.”

“I won’t touch it,” he said sullenly.

110 “Then I’ll leave you here by yourself,” I threatened, and made as if I were going down.

Doodle was frightened of being left. “Don’t go leave me, Brother,” he cried, and he leaned toward the coffin. His hand, trembling, reached out, and when he touched the casket he screamed. A screech owl flapped out of the box into our faces, scaring us and covering us with Paris green. Doodle was paralyzed, so I put him on my shoulder and carried him down the ladder, and even when we were outside in the bright sunshine, he clung to me, crying, “Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me.”

120 When Doodle was five years old, I was embarrassed at having a brother of that age who couldn’t walk, so I set out to teach him. We were down in Old Woman Swamp and it was spring and the sick-sweet smell of bay flowers hung everywhere like a mournful song. “I’m going to teach you to walk, Doodle,” I said.

He was sitting comfortably on the soft grass, leaning back against the pine. “Why?” he asked.

I hadn’t expected such an answer. “So I won’t have to haul you around all the time.”

“I can’t walk, Brother,” he said.

**E MAKE INFERENCES**

Describe the relationship that develops between the brothers. What do you think is the reason that Doodle wins the narrator over?

**F THEME**

In lines 100–102, the narrator makes a direct statement that offers clues to the theme. Paraphrase the message he expresses.

4. **Paris green:** a poisonous green powder used to kill pests.

“Who says so?” I demanded.

130 “Mama, the doctor—everybody.”

“Oh, you can walk,” I said, and I took him by the arms and stood him up. He collapsed onto the grass like a half-empty flour sack. It was as if he had no bones in his little legs.

“Don’t hurt me, Brother,” he warned.

“Shut up. I’m not going to hurt you. I’m going to teach you to walk.”

I heaved him up again, and again he collapsed.

This time he did not lift his face up out of the rubber grass. “I just can’t do it. Let’s make honeysuckle wreaths.”

140 “Oh yes you can, Doodle,” I said. “All you got to do is try. Now come on,” and I hauled him up once more.

It seemed so hopeless from the beginning that it’s a miracle I didn’t give up. But all of us must have something or someone to be proud of, and Doodle had become mine. I did not know then that pride is a wonderful, terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death. Every day that summer we went to the pine beside the stream of Old Woman Swamp, and I put him on his feet at least a hundred times each afternoon. Occasionally I too became discouraged because it didn’t seem as if he was trying, and I would say, “Doodle, don’t you *want* to learn to walk?” **G**

150 He’d nod his head, and I’d say, “Well, if you don’t keep trying, you’ll never learn.” Then I’d paint for him a picture of us as old men, white-haired, him with a long white beard and me still pulling him around in the go-cart. This never failed to make him try again.

Finally one day, after many weeks of practicing, he stood alone for a few seconds. When he fell, I grabbed him in my arms and hugged him, our laughter pealing through the swamp like a ringing bell. Now we knew it could be done. Hope no longer hid in the dark palmetto thicket but perched like a cardinal in the lacy toothbrush tree, brilliantly visible.

“Yes, yes,” I cried, and he cried it too, and the grass beneath us was soft and the smell of the swamp was sweet.

160 With success so **imminent**, we decided not to tell anyone until he could actually walk. Each day, barring rain, we sneaked into Old Woman Swamp, and by cotton-picking time Doodle was ready to show what he could do. He still wasn’t able to walk far, but we could wait no longer. Keeping a nice secret is very hard to do, like holding your breath. We chose to reveal all on October eighth, Doodle’s sixth birthday, and for weeks ahead we mooned around the house, promising everybody a most spectacular surprise. Aunt Nicey said that, after so much talk, if we produced anything less tremendous than the Resurrection,<sup>5</sup> she was going to be disappointed.

170 At breakfast on our chosen day, when Mama, Daddy, and Aunt Nicey were in the dining room, I brought Doodle to the door in the go-cart just as usual and had them turn their backs, making them cross their hearts and hope to

**G MAKE INFERENCES**

Why does the narrator try so hard to teach Doodle to walk? Point out statements in lines 141–148 that support your answer.

**imminent** (ɪm’ə-nənt)  
*adj.* about to occur

5. **the Resurrection:** the rising of Jesus Christ from the dead after his burial.



die if they peeked. I helped Doodle up, and when he was standing alone I let them look. There wasn't a sound as Doodle walked slowly across the room and sat down at his place at the table. Then Mama began to cry and ran over to him, hugging him and kissing him. Daddy hugged him too, so I went to Aunt Nicey, who was thanks praying in the doorway, and began to waltz her around. We danced together quite well until she came down on my big toe with her brogans,<sup>6</sup> hurting me so badly I thought I was crippled for life.

Doodle told them it was I who had taught him to walk, so everyone wanted  
180 to hug me, and I began to cry.

"What are you crying for?" asked Daddy, but I couldn't answer. They did not know that I did it for myself; that pride, whose slave I was, spoke to me louder than all their voices, and that Doodle walked only because I was ashamed of having a crippled brother. **H**

Within a few months Doodle had learned to walk well and his go-cart was put up in the barn loft (it's still there) beside his little mahogany coffin. Now, when we roamed off together, resting often, we never turned back until our destination had been reached, and to help pass the time, we took up lying. From the beginning Doodle was a terrible liar and he got me in the habit. Had  
190 anyone stopped to listen to us, we would have been sent off to Dix Hill.<sup>7</sup>

My lies were scary, involved, and usually pointless, but Doodle's were twice as crazy. People in his stories all had wings and flew wherever they wanted to go. His favorite lie was about a boy named Peter who had a pet peacock with a ten-foot tail. Peter wore a golden robe that glittered so brightly that when he walked through the sunflowers they turned away from the sun to face him. When Peter was ready to go to sleep, the peacock spread his magnificent tail, enfolding the boy gently like a closing go-to-sleep flower, burying him in the gloriously iridescent, rustling vortex.<sup>8</sup> Yes, I must admit it. Doodle could beat me lying. **I**

200 Doodle and I spent lots of time thinking about our future. We decided that when we were grown we'd live in Old Woman Swamp and pick dog-tongue for a living. Beside the stream, he planned, we'd build us a house of whispering leaves and the swamp birds would be our chickens. All day long (when we weren't gathering dog-tongue) we'd swing through the cypresses on the rope vines, and if it rained we'd huddle beneath an umbrella tree and play stickfrog. Mama and Daddy could come and live with us if they wanted to. He even came up with the idea that he could marry Mama and I could marry Daddy. Of course, I was old enough to know this wouldn't work out, but the picture he painted was so beautiful and serene that all I could do was whisper Yes, yes.

#### **H** MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 181–184.  
Why is the narrator ashamed of himself?

#### **I** GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 194–199.  
Hurst uses a variety of sentence structures, containing **independent and subordinate clauses**, to add rhythm and interest to his writing.

6. **brogans** (brō'gənz): heavy, ankle-high work shoes.

7. **Dix Hill**: common name for a mental hospital in Raleigh, North Carolina.

8. **iridescent rustling vortex**: the shimmering, rainbow-colored peacock feathers are in a funnel shape, like a whirlpool or whirlwind (vortex).



210 Once I had succeeded in teaching Doodle to walk, I began to believe in my own **infallibility**, and I prepared a terrific development program for him, unknown to Mama and Daddy, of course. I would teach him to run, to swim, to climb trees, and to fight. He, too, now believed in my infallibility, so we set the deadline for these accomplishments less than a year away, when, it had been decided, Doodle could start to school.

220 That winter we didn't make much progress, for I was in school and Doodle suffered from one bad cold after another. But when spring came, rich and warm, we raised our sights again. Success lay at the end of summer like a pot of gold, and our campaign got off to a good start. On hot days, Doodle and I went down to Horsehead Landing, and I gave him swimming lessons or showed him how to row a boat. Sometimes we descended into the cool greenness of Old Woman Swamp and climbed the rope vines or boxed

**infallibility**  
(ĭn-făĭ'ə-bĭl'ĭ-tē) *n.* an inability to make errors



*Autumn Embers (Frosted Scarlet Sage)* (1944), Charles Burchfield. Watercolor on paper, 22 1/2" x 28".  
Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York.

scientifically beneath the pine where he had learned to walk. Promise hung about us like the leaves, and wherever we looked, ferns unfurled and birds broke into song.

That summer, the summer of 1918, was blighted. In May and June there was no rain and the crops withered, curled up, then died under the thirsty sun. One morning in July a hurricane came out of the east, tipping over the oaks in the yard and splitting the limbs of the elm trees. That afternoon it roared  
230 back out of the west, blew the fallen oaks around, snapping their roots and tearing them out of the earth like a hawk at the entrails of a chicken. Cotton bolls were wrenched from the stalks and lay like green walnuts in the valleys between the rows, while the cornfield leaned over uniformly so that the tassels touched the ground. Doodle and I followed Daddy out into the cotton field, where he stood, shoulders sagging, surveying the ruin. When his chin sank down onto his chest, we were frightened, and Doodle slipped his hand into mine. Suddenly Daddy straightened his shoulders, raised a giant knuckly fist, and with a voice that seemed to rumble out of the earth itself began cursing heaven, hell, the weather, and the Republican Party.<sup>9</sup> Doodle and I, prodding  
240 each other and giggling, went back to the house, knowing that everything would be all right.

9. **Republican Party:** In 1918, most Southerners were Democrats.

### ◀ Analyze Visuals

How do the color, brush strokes, and subject matter of this painting create a **mood** of sorrow and despair?

COMMON CORE L 4b

### Language Coach

**Prefixes** Word parts that come before base words are **prefixes**. The base word *furled* in line 224 means “rolled up.” The prefix *un-*, which comes from Old English, means “the opposite of,” or “not.” What is the definition of *unfurled*? What other words include the prefix *un-*?

And during that summer, strange names were heard through the house: Château-Thierry, Amiens, Soissons, and in her blessing at the supper table, Mama once said, “And bless the Pearsons, whose boy Joe was lost at Belleau Wood.”<sup>10</sup>

So we came to that clove of seasons. School was only a few weeks away, and Doodle was far behind schedule. He could barely clear the ground when climbing up the rope vines, and his swimming was certainly not passable.

We decided to double our efforts, to make that last drive and reach our pot of  
250 gold. I made him swim until he turned blue and row until he couldn’t lift an oar. Wherever we went, I purposely walked fast, and although he kept up, his face turned red and his eyes became glazed. Once, he could go no further, so he collapsed on the ground and began to cry.

“Aw, come on, Doodle,” I urged. “You can do it. Do you want to be different from everybody else when you start school?”

“Does it make any difference?”

“It certainly does,” I said. “Now, come on,” and I helped him up.

As we slipped through dog days,<sup>11</sup> Doodle began to look feverish, and Mama felt his forehead, asking him if he felt ill. At night he didn’t sleep well,  
260 and sometimes he had nightmares, crying out until I touched him and said, “Wake up, Doodle. Wake up.” **J**

It was Saturday noon, just a few days before school was to start. I should have already admitted defeat, but my pride wouldn’t let me. The excitement of our program had now been gone for weeks, but still we kept on with a tired **doggedness**. It was too late to turn back, for we had both wandered too far into a net of expectations and had left no crumbs behind.

Daddy, Mama, Doodle, and I were seated at the dining-room table having lunch. It was a hot day, with all the windows and doors open in case a breeze should come. In the kitchen Aunt Nicey was humming softly. After a long  
270 silence, Daddy spoke. “It’s so calm, I wouldn’t be surprised if we had a storm this afternoon.”

“I haven’t heard a rain frog,” said Mama, who believed in signs, as she served the bread around the table.

“I did,” declared Doodle. “Down in the swamp.”

“He didn’t,” I said contrarily.

“You did, eh?” said Daddy, ignoring my denial.

“I certainly did,” Doodle **reiterated**, scowling at me over the top of his iced-tea glass, and we were quiet again.

Suddenly, from out in the yard, came a strange croaking noise. Doodle  
280 stopped eating, with a piece of bread poised ready for his mouth, his eyes popped round like two blue buttons. “What’s that?” he whispered.

**J MAKE INFERENCES**

What is happening to Doodle?

**doggedness**  
(dô’gĭd-nĭs)  
*n.* persistence;  
stubbornness

**reiterate** (rē-ĭt’ē-rāt’)  
*v.* to repeat

10. **Château-Thierry** (shā-tō-tyĕ-rĕ’), **Amiens** (ā-myăĭn’), **Soissons** (swă-sōĭn’), . . . **Belleau** (bel’ō) **Wood**: places in France where famous battles were fought near the end of World War I (1914–1918).

11. **dog days**: the hot, uncomfortable days between early July and early September (named after the Dog Star, Sirius, which rises and sets with the sun at this time).



I jumped up, knocking over my chair, and had reached the door when Mama called, “Pick up the chair, sit down again, and say excuse me.”

By the time I had done this, Doodle had excused himself and had slipped out into the yard. He was looking up into the bleeding tree. “It’s a great big red bird!” he called. **K**

The bird croaked loudly again, and Mama and Daddy came out into the yard. We shaded our eyes with our hands against the hazy glare of the sun and peered up through the still leaves. On the topmost branch a bird the size  
290 of a chicken, with scarlet feathers and long legs, was perched **precariously**. Its wings hung down loosely, and as we watched, a feather dropped away and floated slowly down through the green leaves.

“It’s not even frightened of us,” Mama said.

“It looks tired,” Daddy added. “Or maybe sick.”

Doodle’s hands were clasped at his throat, and I had never seen him stand still so long. “What is it?” he asked.

Daddy shook his head. “I don’t know, maybe it’s—”

At that moment the bird began to flutter, but the wings were uncoordinated, and amid much flapping and a spray of flying feathers, it  
300 tumbled down, bumping through the limbs of the bleeding tree and landing at our feet with a thud. Its long, graceful neck jerked twice into an S, then straightened out, and the bird was still. A white veil came over the eyes and the long white beak unhinged. Its legs were crossed and its clawlike feet were delicately curved at rest. Even death did not mar its grace, for it lay on the earth like a broken vase of red flowers, and we stood around it, awed by its **exotic** beauty. **L**

“It’s dead,” Mama said.

“What is it?” Doodle repeated.

“Go bring me the bird book,” said Daddy.

I ran into the house and brought back the bird book. As we watched, Daddy  
310 thumbed through its pages. “It’s a scarlet ibis,” he said, pointing to a picture. “It lives in the tropics—South America to Florida. A storm must have brought it here.”

Sadly, we all looked back at the bird. A scarlet ibis! How many miles it had traveled to die like this, in *our* yard, beneath the bleeding tree.

“Let’s finish lunch,” Mama said, nudging us back toward the dining room.

“I’m not hungry,” said Doodle, and he knelt down beside the ibis.

“We’ve got peach cobbler for dessert,” Mama tempted from the doorway.

Doodle remained kneeling. “I’m going to bury him.”

320 “Don’t you dare touch him,” Mama warned. “There’s no telling what disease he might have had.”

“All right,” said Doodle. “I won’t.”

Daddy, Mama, and I went back to the dining-room table, but we watched Doodle through the open door. He took out a piece of string from his pocket

**K SYMBOL**

What clues suggest that the appearance of the bird might be important?

**precariously**

(prī-kâr’ē-ēs-lē) *adv.*  
insecurely; in a dangerous or unstable way

**exotic** (īg-zōt’īk) *adj.*  
excitingly strange

**L SYMBOL**

What characteristics of the scarlet ibis are emphasized in lines 298–306?

and, without touching the ibis, looped one end around its neck. Slowly, while singing softly “Shall We Gather at the River,” he carried the bird around to the front yard and dug a hole in the flower garden, next to the petunia bed. Now we were watching him through the front window, but he didn’t know it. His awkwardness at digging the hole with a shovel whose handle was twice as long  
330 as he was made us laugh, and we covered our mouths with our hands so he wouldn’t hear.

When Doodle came into the dining room, he found us seriously eating our cobbler. He was pale and lingered just inside the screen door. “Did you get the scarlet ibis buried?” asked Daddy.

Doodle didn’t speak but nodded his head.

“Go wash your hands, and then you can have some peach cobbler,” said Mama.

“I’m not hungry,” he said.

“Dead birds is bad luck,” said Aunt Nicey, poking her head from the  
340 kitchen door. “Specially *red* dead birds!” **M**

As soon as I had finished eating, Doodle and I hurried off to Horsehead Landing. Time was short, and Doodle still had a long way to go if he was going to keep up with the other boys when he started school. The sun, gilded with the yellow cast of autumn, still burned fiercely, but the dark green woods through which we passed were shady and cool. When we reached the landing, Doodle said he was too tired to swim, so we got into a skiff and floated down the creek with the tide. Far off in the marsh a rail was scolding, and over on the beach locusts were singing in the myrtle trees. Doodle did not speak and kept his head turned away, letting one hand trail limply in the water.

350 After we had drifted a long way, I put the oars in place and made Doodle row back against the tide. Black clouds began to gather in the southwest, and he kept watching them, trying to pull the oars a little faster. When we reached Horsehead Landing, lightning was playing across half the sky and thunder roared out, hiding even the sound of the sea. The sun disappeared and darkness descended, almost like night. Flocks of marsh crows flew by, heading inland to their roosting trees; and two egrets, squawking, arose from the oyster-rock shallows and careened away.

Doodle was both tired and frightened, and when he stepped from the skiff he collapsed onto the mud, sending an armada of fiddler crabs rustling off into  
360 the marsh grass. I helped him up, and as he wiped the mud off his trousers, he smiled at me ashamedly. He had failed and we both knew it, so we started back home, racing the storm. We never spoke (What are the words that can solder<sup>12</sup> cracked pride?), but I knew he was watching me, watching for a sign of mercy. The lightning was near now, and from fear he walked so close behind me he kept stepping on my heels. The faster I walked, the faster he walked, so

**M SYMBOL**

What is the connection between Doodle and the scarlet ibis?

---

12. **solder** (sɒd’ər): to join or bond together.

I began to run. The rain was coming, roaring through the pines, and then, like a bursting Roman candle, a gum tree ahead of us was shattered by a bolt of lightning. When the deafening peal of thunder had died, and in the moment before the rain arrived, I heard Doodle, who had fallen behind, cry out,

370 “Brother, Brother, don’t leave me! Don’t leave me!”


The knowledge that Doodle’s and my plans had come to naught<sup>13</sup> was bitter, and that streak of cruelty within me awakened. I ran as fast as I could, leaving him far behind with a wall of rain dividing us. The drops stung my face like nettles, and the wind flared the wet glistening leaves of the bordering trees.

Soon I could hear his voice no more. **N**

I hadn’t run too far before I became tired, and the flood of childish spite **evanesced** as well. I stopped and waited for Doodle. The sound of rain was everywhere, but the wind had died and it fell straight down in parallel paths like ropes hanging from the sky. As I waited, I peered through the downpour, but no  
380 one came. Finally I went back and found him huddled beneath a red nightshade bush beside the road. He was sitting on the ground, his face buried in his arms, which were resting on his drawn-up knees. “Let’s go, Doodle,” I said.

He didn’t answer, so I placed my hand on his forehead and lifted his head. Limply, he fell backward onto the earth. He had been bleeding from the mouth, and his neck and the front of his shirt were stained a brilliant red.

“Doodle! Doodle!” I cried, shaking him, but there was no answer but the rosy rain. He lay very awkwardly, with his head thrown far back, making his vermilion<sup>14</sup> neck appear unusually long and slim. His little legs, bent sharply at the knees, had never before seemed so fragile, so thin.

390 I began to weep, and the tear-blurred vision in red before me looked very familiar. “Doodle!” I screamed above the pounding storm and threw my body to the earth above his. For a long long time, it seemed forever, I lay there crying, sheltering my fallen scarlet ibis from the **heresy** of rain. 

**N MAKE INFERENCES**

Why does the narrator continue to run when he knows Doodle has fallen behind him?

**evanesce** (ĕv’ə-nĕs’) *v.*  
to disappear; vanish

**heresy** (hĕr’ĭ-sĕ) *n.* an action or opinion contrary to what is generally thought of as right

13. **had come to naught**: had resulted in nothing.

14. **vermilion** (vĕr-mĭl’ĭ-yən): bright red to reddish orange.





W O M A N  
*with Flower*

Naomi Long Madgett

I wouldn't coax the plant if I were you.  
Such watchful nurturing may do it harm.  
Let the soil rest from so much digging  
And wait until it's dry before you water it.  
5 The leaf's inclined to find its own direction;  
Give it a chance to seek the sunlight for itself.

Much growth is stunted by too careful prodding,  
Too eager tenderness.  
The things we love we have to learn to leave alone.

## Comprehension

1. **Clarify** How is Doodle different from other children?
2. **Recall** What are the narrator’s motives for teaching Doodle?
3. **Summarize** What happens to Doodle, and why?

## Text Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** Look back at the chart you made as you read. Review the inferences you made about the relationship between Doodle and the narrator. How would you describe their relationship over the course of the story?
5. **Analyze Character** The narrator has mixed emotions about Doodle. How might he answer the big question on page 460?
6. **Interpret Symbol** The narrator sees Doodle as the scarlet ibis at the end, but Doodle identifies with the exotic bird immediately. To explore this symbolic connection, identify as many similarities between the ibis and Doodle as you can. Record your comparison in a chart like the one shown.
 

*Scarlet Ibis and Doodle*  
Both are unusual and don't fit in their surroundings.
7. **Analyze Theme and Symbol** Which of the following themes does the **symbolism** of the ibis support? Find details to support your answer.
  - a. Selfish pride generally causes more harm than good.
  - b. Delicate creatures need to be protected and cared for.
  - c. Spiteful cruelty toward a loved one often stems from wounded pride.
8. **Examine Foreshadowing and Mood** Reread lines 298–306. The dramatic death of the ibis foreshadows Doodle’s death. Find at least three other examples of such foreshadowing. What mood do they create?
9. **Compare Literary Works** What advice does the speaker in “Woman with Flower” seem to offer the narrator of “The Scarlet Ibis”? In what ways are the themes of these works similar? In what ways are they different?

## COMMON CORE

**RL 1** Cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from a text. **RL 2** Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text. **RL 3** Analyze how complex characters interact with other characters and develop the theme.

## Text Criticism

10. **Author’s Style** “The Scarlet Ibis” is an example of Southern literature, which is characterized in part by its emphasis on details of time and place, the importance of family and community, an exploration of the past, and a sense of moral dilemma. How are these characteristics evident in this story?

### Why do we **HURT** the ones we **LOVE**?

What consequences can arise from being cruel to loved ones?

# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Identify the word that is not related in meaning to the other words in the set.

1. (a) exotic, (b) ordinary, (c) unusual, (d) foreign
2. (a) impending, (b) imminent, (c) approaching, (d) remote
3. (a) fidelity, (b) heresy, (c) conformity, (d) compliance
4. (a) echo, (b) repeat, (c) originate, (d) reiterate
5. (a) errancy, (b) infallibility, (c) inaccuracy, (d) imperfection
6. (a) insecurely, (b) cleverly, (c) precariously, (d) dangerously
7. (a) disappear, (b) float, (c) vanish, (d) evanesce
8. (a) doggedness, (b) perseverance, (c) tenacity, (d) casualness

### WORD LIST

doggedness  
evanesce  
exotic  
heresy  
imminent  
infallibility  
precariously  
reiterate

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

- context
- interpret
- reveal
- significant
- tradition

This story takes place in the **context** of the rural South in the early 1900s. What would have been different if the context were of a city in 2010? Take one incident from the story and rewrite it, making the changes that would be necessary. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY: DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

While a word's **denotation** refers to a word's definition, a word's **connotation** refers to the attitudes or feelings associated with a word. For example, *doggedness* and *stubbornness* could both be defined as "the quality of not giving in readily," but, in the context of the story, the use of the word *doggedness* to describe Doodle's efforts conveys positive connotations not associated with *stubbornness*. Writers use connotation to communicate certain feelings and to evoke a mood. Being aware of these connotations can enrich your understanding of what you read.

**PRACTICE** Place the words in each group on a continuum like the one shown to show the positive or negative associations each word connotes. Then compare your answers with those of a classmate.

highly negative ←————→ highly positive

1. talk, vent, articulate
2. new, fresh, original
3. choosy, finicky, particular
4. smile, smirk, grin
5. responsibility, obligation, duty

### COMMON CORE

**L.5b** Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central

Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).

KEYWORD: HML9-478

## Language

### ◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Vary Sentence Structure

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 468. Hurst uses a variety of sentence structures in his writing. Using only one type of sentence can make your writing sound dull.

All complete sentences contain at least one **independent clause**, which can stand on its own. (*Doodle went to sleep.*) Some combine the independent clause or clauses with one or more **subordinate clauses**, which cannot stand alone. (*Doodle went to sleep while the family ate dinner.*) This kind of variety, as found in this passage from Hurst's story, makes for better-sounding prose:

*I lifted him out and set him down in the soft rubber grass beside a tall pine. His eyes were round with wonder as he gazed about him, and his little hands began to stroke the rubber grass.* (lines 87–89)

Below, notice how the revisions in blue improve the rhythm of this first draft. Revise your response to the prompt below by incorporating a variety of sentence structures.

#### STUDENT MODEL

The narrator sometimes shows he cares for Doodle, but He also seems to enjoy making his brother feel trapped and alone, as if He treats Doodle like an animal. In reality, Doodle is just a child, who He does his best to overcome a serious illness.

### READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Add to your understanding of “The Scarlet Ibis” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

#### WRITING PROMPT

##### Extended Constructed Response: Character Analysis

Do you blame the narrator for what happens to Doodle? Consider his age, his mixed emotions, and what he says about himself. Write a **three- to five-paragraph response** analyzing his role in Doodle's death.

#### REVISING TIP

Review your response. How have you used independent and subordinate clauses to make your prose sound better?

#### COMMON CORE

**L 1b** Use various types of clauses to add variety and interest to writing. **W 9a (RL 3)** Draw evidence from literary texts; analyze how complex characters interact with other characters.

Interactive  
Revision



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML9-479