

How to identify references that demonstrate understanding of a short story

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **"Powder" by Tobias Wolff**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

In this objective, remember that you want to find pertinent references to demonstrate your understanding of the reading. References that demonstrate an understanding of the reading do not always have to be **direct quotations** from the text. References to such aspects as character and plot, for example, can be quite specific without directly quoting from the story. Your references must always show, however, that you have a clear comprehension of the text.

Instructions

For each critical/analytical paragraph below, locate two valid quotes from the short story "Powder" that directly support the main point the analytical paragraph conveys. Compare your quote selection with those in the **Answer key**.

Exercise 3

Paragraph 1

One of the first details the reader notices in the introduction to the story is the fact that it is Christmas Eve and that the father has promised to get his son home in time for dinner. Ironically, this family time will be interrupted by the conflict between the husband and wife. The tension between them is further developed when the reader discovers that the couple have separated and the wife/mother doubts the father's sense of responsibility, especially since during an earlier outing, the father sneaked their son into a night club. This conflict continues throughout the story.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 2

When despite the commitment he has made to bring his son home in time for Christmas Eve dinner, the father decides to take a few more ski runs after checking out of the ski lodge, the reader understands that the father is willing to take risks.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 3

The narrator is clearly cautious and insecure in the company of his father, someone who exhibits the opposite characteristics. The contrast between the father preparing to drive home in stormy conditions and the comforts of home the son is imagining illustrates the son's need for security and the father's drive for adventure.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 4

When the father pretends to make a phone call to his (ex) wife, we can presume he is attempting to show that he is being responsible, yet ironically, he is also awaiting the departure of the state trooper so he and his son can sneak through the barrier blocking the closed road. This shows his daring and spontaneous nature.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 5

When the son comes to the sudden realization that his father is in complete control of the situation, he enjoys the rest of the trip driving with his father. He discovers that he can trust his father's actions and enjoy their experience together without worry. This is a huge milestone in new-found appreciation for accepting his father and his life circumstances as they are.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Answer key

The quotes you have selected will not necessarily be the exact quotes listed below, but should be similar in content.

Paragraph 1

He's had to fight for the privilege of my company, because my mother was still angry with him for sneaking me into a night club during his last visit, to see Thelonious Monk.

He promised, hand on heart, to take good care of me and have me home for dinner on Christmas Eve, and she relented.

Paragraph 2

... in this snow he observed some rare quality that made it necessary for us to get in one last run.

As the lift bore us to the peak yet again, my father looked at his watch and said, "Criminy. This'll have to be a fast one."

Paragraph 3

I could see everything. The green tablecloth, the plates with the holly pattern, the red candles waiting to be lit.

We returned our skis and my father put chains on the Austin-Healey while I swayed from foot to foot, clapping my mittens and wishing I was home.

Paragraph 4

When we finished eating he went to the pay phone in the back of the diner... I figured he called my mother, but he didn't give a report.

We drove away from the resort, right up to the barricade. "Move it," my father told me.

Paragraph 5

My father was driving. My father in his forty-eighth year, rumped, kind, bankrupt of honour, flushed with certainty. He was a great driver.

I actually trusted him... Except maybe to say this: if you haven't driven fresh powder, you haven't driven.

How to identify references that demonstrate understanding of a short story

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **"Powder" by Tobias Wolff**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

In this objective, remember that you want to find pertinent references to demonstrate your understanding of the reading. It is likely that at some point in an analysis of a short story, you will need to find examples from the text to support your interpretation of the main character(s). References that demonstrate an understanding of the reading do not always have to be **direct quotations** from the text. A reference can be very specific without being an exact quote from the story. Your references must always show, however, that you have a clear comprehension of the text.

Instructions

To practise finding examples to support your interpretation of character, find three examples from the text to support your interpretation of the following character traits that describe the father and son. The examples you find do not need to be direct quotations.

Exercise

Father's traits

- Irresponsible
- Risk-taker
- Persistent/persuasive

Son's traits

- Responsible
- Cautious
- Anxious

Father

1. Irresponsible

- a) _____

- b) _____

- c) _____

2. Risk-taker

- a) _____

- b) _____

- c) _____

3. Persistent/persuasive

- a) _____

- b) _____

- c) _____

Son

1. Responsible

- a) _____

- b) _____

- c) _____

2. Cautious

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

3. Anxious

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Answer key

Answers may vary.

Father

1. Irresponsible
 - a) Sneaks his son into a night club
 - b) Wants to drive the closed road even though the state trooper indicates it is closed
 - c) Is aware his (ex) wife will not forgive him for being irresponsible, once again
2. Risk-taker
 - a) Takes one last ski run in the storm
 - b) Instructs his son to move the barricade so they can drive the closed road
 - c) Tells his son not to ever try driving a closed road
3. Persistent/persuasive
 - a) “He wouldn’t give up. He promised hand on heart to take good care of me...”
 - b) He drives the road even though it is closed because he sees himself as a great driver.
 - c) The father wheedles his way past the state troopers.

Son

1. Responsible
 - a) The son points out they should have left earlier.
 - b) He bothers teachers for homework ahead of time.
 - c) He states he won’t even “try” what his father has.

2. Cautious

- a) “I stuck to him like white on rice and did what he did...”
- b) He always thinks ahead.
- c) He actually trusts his father behind the wheel which shows that he is thinking about his father’s driving ability.

3. Anxious

- a) “I swayed from foot to foot, clapping my mittens and wishing I was home...”
- b) “To keep my hands from shaking I clamped them between my knees.”
- c) He worries about the whereabouts of the state trooper.