

Sherwood Anderson

Stolen Day

WARMING UP

Speaking

■ *Before reading the story, answer the following questions.*

- 1 Have you ever faked a sickness to miss school?
- 2 Which illnesses do you fear most? Why?

WHILE READING

Comprehension

■ *While reading through, answer the questions in the margin.*

It must be that all children are actors. The whole thing started with a boy on our street named Walter, who had inflammatory rheumatism. That's what they called it. He didn't have to go to school.

Still he could walk about. He could go fishing in the creek¹ or the waterworks **pond**. There was a place up at the pond where in the spring the water came tumbling² over the dam and formed a deep pool. It was a good place. Sometimes you could get some good big ones there.

I went down that way on my way to school one spring morning. It was out of my way but I wanted to see if Walter was there.

He was, inflammatory rheumatism and all. There he was, sitting with a **fish pole** in his hand. He had been able to walk down there all right.

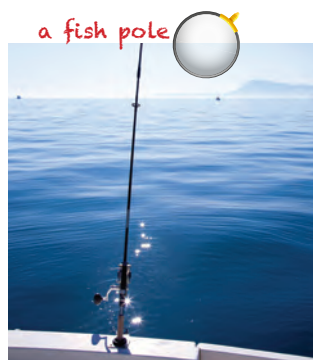
It was then that my own legs began to hurt. My back too. I went on to school but, at the recess time, I began to cry. I did it when the teacher, Sarah Suggett, had come out into the schoolhouse yard.

She came right over to me.



Who is Walter?

What does the expression "good big ones" refer to?



What is Walter doing?

Glossary

1 small stream 2 falling

“I ache all over,” I said. I did, too.

I kept on crying and it worked all right.

“You’d better go home,” she said.

So I went. I limped³ painfully away. I kept on limping until I got out of the schoolhouse street.

Then I felt better. I still had inflammatory rheumatism pretty bad but I could get along better.

I must have done some thinking on the way home.

“I’d better not say I have inflammatory rheumatism,” I decided. “Maybe if you’ve got that you swell up.”

I thought I’d better go around to where Walter was and ask him about that, so I did – but he wasn’t there.

“They must not be biting today,” I thought.

I had a feeling that, if I said I had inflammatory rheumatism, Mother or my brothers and my sister Stella might laugh. They did laugh at me pretty often and I didn’t like it at all.

“Just the same,” I said to myself, “I have got it.” I began to hurt and ache again.

I went home and sat on the front steps of our house. I sat there a long time. There wasn’t anyone at home but Mother and the two little ones. Ray would have been four or five then and Earl might have been three.

It was Earl who saw me there. I had got tired sitting and was lying on the porch. Earl was always a quiet, solemn little fellow.

He must have said something to Mother for presently⁴ she came. “What’s the matter with you? Why aren’t you in school?” she asked.

I came pretty near telling her right out that I had inflammatory rheumatism but I thought I’d better not. Mother and Father had been speaking of Walter’s case at the table just the day before. “It affects the heart,” Father had said. That frightened me when I thought of it. “I might die,” I thought. “I might just suddenly die right here; my heart might stop beating.”

Who “must not be biting”?

Who are Ray and Earl?



Glossary

³ walked slowly and with difficulty ⁴ after a short time



On the day before I had been running a race with my brother Irve. We were up at the fairgrounds⁵ after school and there was a half-mile track.

“I’ll bet you can’t run a half-mile,” he said. “I bet you I could beat you running clear around the track.”

And so we did it and I beat him, but afterwards my heart did seem to beat pretty hard. I remembered that lying there on the porch. “It’s a wonder, with my inflammatory rheumatism and all, I didn’t just drop down dead,” I thought. The thought frightened me a lot. I ached worse than ever.

“I ache, Ma,” I said. “I just ache.”

She made me go in the house and upstairs and get into bed. It wasn’t so good. It was spring. I was up there for perhaps an hour, maybe two, and then I felt better.

I got up and went downstairs. “I feel better, Ma,” I said.

Mother said she was glad. She was pretty busy that day and hadn’t paid much attention to me. She had made me get into bed upstairs and then hadn’t even come up to see how I was. I didn’t think much of that when I was up there but when I got downstairs where she was, and when, after I had said I felt better and she only said she was glad and went right on with her work, I began to ache again.

I thought, “I’ll bet I die of it. I bet I do.”

I went out to the front porch and sat down. I was pretty sore⁶ at Mother.

“If she really knew the truth, that I have the inflammatory rheumatism and I may just drop down dead any time, I’ll bet she wouldn’t care about that either,” I thought.

I was getting more and more angry the more thinking I did. “I know what I’m going to do,” I thought; “I’m going to go fishing.”

I thought that, feeling the way I did, I might be sitting on the high bank just above the deep pool where the water went over the dam, and suddenly my heart would stop beating.

What is the narrator afraid of?

Why is the narrator angry?

Glossary

5 outdoor area where fairs, circuses, and exhibitions are held **6** upset

And then, of course, I'd pitch⁷ forward, over the bank into the pool and, if I wasn't dead when I hit the water; I'd drown sure.

They would all come home to supper and they'd miss me.

"But where is he?"

Then Mother would remember that I'd come home from school aching.

She'd go upstairs and I wouldn't be there. One day during the year before, there was a child got drowned⁸ in the spring. It was one of the Wyatt Children.

Right down at the end of the street there was a spring under a birch tree and there had been a barrel⁹ sunk in the ground.

Everyone had always been saying the spring ought to be kept covered, but it wasn't.

So the Wyatt child went down there, played around alone, and fell in and got drowned.

Mother was the one who had found the drowned child. She had gone to get a pail of water and there the child was, drowned and dead.

This had been in the evening when we were all at home, and Mother had come running up the street with the dead, dripping child in her arms. She was making for the Wyatt house as hard as she could run and she was pale.

She had a terrible look on her face, I remembered then.

"So," I thought, "they'll miss me and there'll be a search made. Very likely there'll be someone who has seen me sitting by the pond fishing, and there'll be a big alarm and all the town will turn out and they'll drag the pond."

I was having a grand¹⁰ time, having died. Maybe, after they found me and had got me out of the deep pool, Mother would grab¹¹ me up in her arms and run home with me as she had run with the Wyatt child.

I got up from the porch and went around the house. I got my



Glossary

7 fall 8 died by being unable to breathe underwater 9 a round usually wooden container with curved sides and flat ends 10 impressive 11 quickly take and hold

fishing pole and lit out¹² for the pool below the dam. Mother was busy – she always was – and didn't see me go. When I got there I thought I'd better not sit too near the edge of the high bank.

By this time I didn't ache hardly at all, but I thought.

“With inflammatory rheumatism you can't tell,” I thought.

“It probably comes and goes,” I thought.

“Walter has it and he goes fishing,” I thought.

I had got my line into the pool and suddenly I got a bite. It was a regular whopper.¹³ I knew that. I'd never had a bit like that. I knew what it was. It was one of Mr. Fenn's big **carp**. Mr. Fenn was a man who had a big pond of his own. He sold ice in the summer and the pond was to make the ice. He had bought some big carp and put them into his pond and then, earlier in the spring when there was a freshet,¹⁴ his dam had gone out.

So the carp had got into our creek and one or two big ones had been caught – but none of them by a boy like me.

The carp was pulling and I was pulling and I was afraid he'd break my line, so I just tumbled down the high bank, holding onto the line and got right into the pool. We had it out there in the pool. We struggled. We wrestled.¹⁵ Then I got a hand under his gills and got him out.

He was a big one all right. He was nearly half as big as I was myself. I had him on the bank and I kept one hand under his gills¹⁶ and I ran.

I never ran so hard in my life. He was slippery, and now and then he wriggled¹⁷ out of my arms; once I stumbled and fell on him, but I got him home.

So there it was. I was a big hero that day. Mother got a **wash-tub** and filled it with water. She put the fish in it and all the neighbors came to look. I got into dry clothes and went down to supper – and then I made a break that spoiled my day.



Why has the narrator become a big hero?



Glossary

12 left in a hurry **13** very big fish **14** freshwater stream flowing into the sea **15** fought by holding and pushing **16** the respiratory organs of aquatic animals **17** twisted from side to side

There we were, all of us, at the table, and suddenly Father asked what had been the matter with me at school. He had met the teacher, Sarah Suggett, on the street and she had told him how I had become ill.

“What was the matter with you?” Father had asked, and before I thought what I was saying I let it out.

“I had the inflammatory rheumatism,” I said – and a shout went up. It made me sick to hear them, the way they all laughed.

It brought back all the aching again, and like a fool I began to cry.

“Well, I have got it – I have, I have,” I cried, and got up from the table and ran upstairs.

I stayed there until Mother came up. I knew it would be a long time before I heard the last of the inflammatory rheumatism. I was sick all right, but the aching I now had wasn't in my legs or in my back.

How did the father learn that the narrator left school that day?

CLOSE READING

Comprehension

■ *Answer the following questions.*

- 1 When does the narrator first experience the symptoms of his “disease”?
.....
- 2 How would you describe the narrator’s reaction when he sees Walter fishing at the pond?
.....
- 3 Explain the nature of the narrator’s “disease” with reference to the text.
.....
- 4 How does his mother react when he comes home from school?
.....
- 5 Why does the author tell us that all children are actors?
.....
- 6 Why does the narrator have a death fantasy?
.....

7 What lesson does the narrator learn at the end of the story?

8 Why do you think this short story was entitled *Stolen Day*?

Matching

■ Match a word in the first column with one in the second column, then provide the Italian equivalents.

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------|
| 1 Spring | A Steps | ..... |
| 2 Fishing | B Tree | ..... |
| 3 Recess | C Pole | ..... |
| 4 Front | D Rheumatism | ..... |
| 5 Birch | E Time | ..... |
| 6 Inflammatory | F Morning | ..... |

Adjectives

■ Read the story again and find the opposite of the following adjectives.

- 1 Shallow
- 2 Bad
- 3 Worse
- 4 Front
- 5 Noisy
- 6 Sad
- 7 Inactive
- 8 Pleased
- 9 Later
- 10 Short

Verbs

■ Match each verb with the corresponding noun. Then build a sentence of your own for each verb.

- | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------|
| 1 Get | A A race | ..... |
| 2 Affect | B The pond | ..... |
| 3 Run | C A washtub | ..... |
| 4 Drag | D A break | ..... |
| 5 Fill | E A fish | ..... |
| 6 Make | F The heart | ..... |

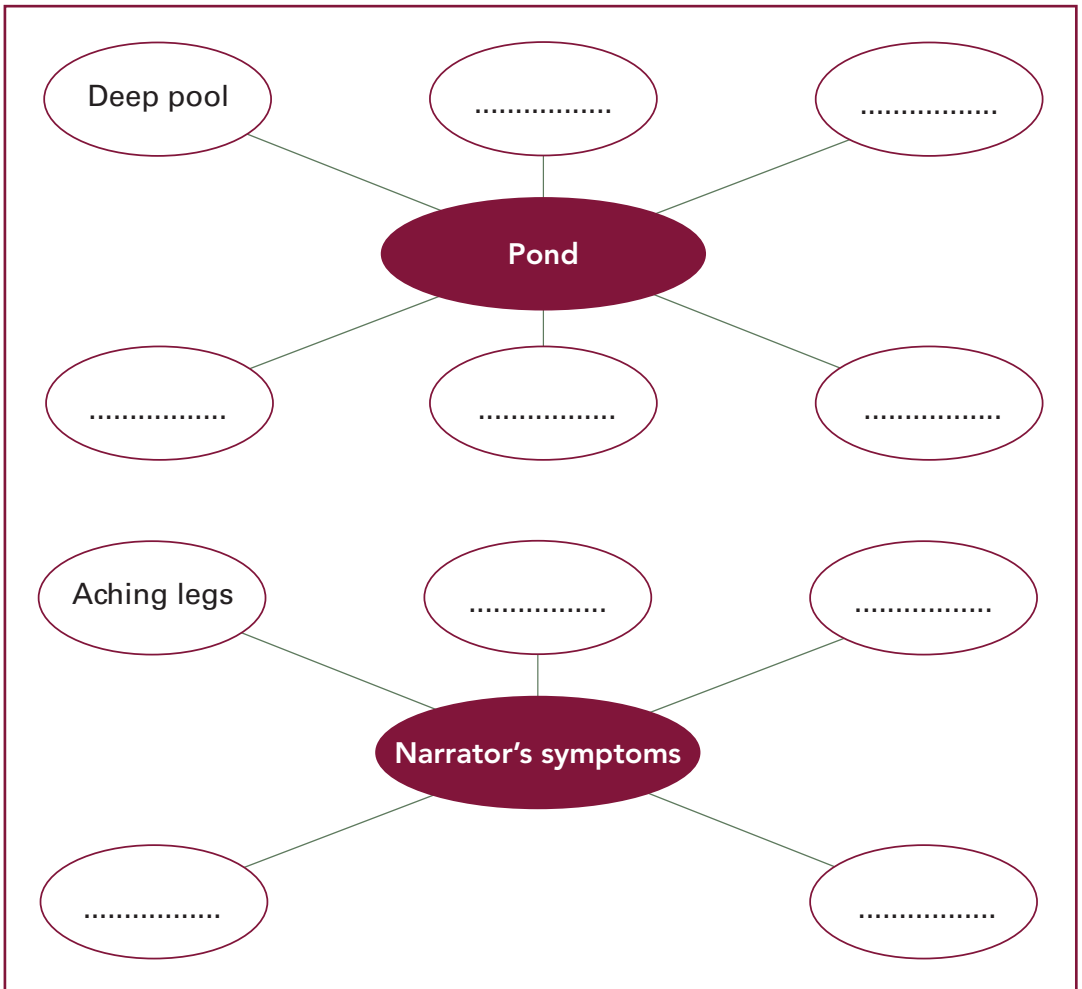
Prepositions

■ *Fill in the blanks with the missing prepositions.*

- 1 I went down that way my way to school one spring morning.
- 2 Sarah Suggett had come out the schoolhouse yard.
- 3 I kept on limping until I got out the schoolhouse street.
- 4 What's the matter you?
- 5 She was pretty busy that day and hadn't paid much attention me.
- 6 She had a terrible look her face, I remembered then.
- 7 It brought all the aching again, and like a fool I began to cry.
- 8 I got up the table and ran upstairs.

Mind mapping

■ *Complete the mind maps below with words from the story.*



Short story graphic organiser

- **Now fill in the graphic organiser below, focusing on the main aspects of the short story you have just read. Look online and gather some information about the author and the collection this story belongs to.**

Short story graphic organiser		
TITLE		
COLLECTION		DATE
AUTHOR		
AUTHOR'S SHORT BIOGRAPHY		
.....		
.....		
SETTING		
Time		Place
.....		
CHARACTERS		
Main characters	Minor characters	Describe the main character(s)
.....
.....
.....	.....	Round or flat?
.....
.....
POINT OF VIEW		
Internal or external?		
CONFLICT		
Person vs group		
THEME		
What is the author's message about life, human behaviour, or society?		
.....		
.....		
SYMBOLS		
What does the narrator's imaginary disease symbolise?		
.....		
.....		
NARRATIVE MODES		
Provide an example of the following narrative modes quoting from the text.		
Narration		
Description		
Dialogue		

Writing an analysis paragraph

- *What would you do in the course of a single stolen day? Would you spend the day alone or with friends? Write an explanatory paragraph saying what you would do.*

ACTING IT OUT

Role-playing

- *In pairs, act out the dialogue between the narrator and his father.*

Speaking

- *Imagine you are the narrator and explain what your feelings were when your father asked you about your illness.*

FROM THE PRESS

Reporting

- *Read the following article and report its content to the rest of the class. You may make use of notes and charts.*

All of a sudden, your kid is nursing a cold. Then it's a horrible tummy ache. Then their head hurts.

Trouble is, they were fine just a few minutes ago.

Coincidentally, you find out that one (or more) of the following things is occurring:

- your child has a newfound bully;
- your child is struggling with a new subject (math/spelling/reading);
- your child dislikes his new teacher or there's been a change in the curriculum;
- your child just wants some extra attention from you, alone;
- your child needs a “mental health day” away from school.
- your child is officially addicted to video games and would much rather stay home in bed all day playing Minecraft than be at school slugging through the Three R's.

Your child's feigned illness may

YOUR CHILD'S FAKE ILLNESS MAY BE MORE SERIOUS THAN YOU THINK

be caused by a number of things. The desire to stay home may be linked to something minor, like just wanting to have the freedom to play all day or take it easy. Conversely, not wanting to go to school could be the result of something major, like being the victim of bullying. Consider any recent changes to your child's life – both at school and at home. Remember, even what an adult may consider a minor change or shift in how things are done can have a major effect on kids.

Look for measurable, physiological symptoms. Take their temper-

ature, gauge their behaviour (sick one moment, happy and laughing the next) and look for other tell-tale signs of real illness. Following all of these steps will help you figure out what's really going on with your child and whether or not you have real cause for concern. Talk to your child consistently. Discuss their daily activities, specifically what they're doing in school as part of your regular conversations.

You may have an inkling that your child's problem is more involved than you had originally thought. Your first instinct may be to say “You're fine!” or “No, you're not sick! You're going to school.” Often, if a child is indeed faking being sick, there are larger issues at play. A gentle touch and gentle prodding will likely garner you much more information than following your first instincts that may stop your child from revealing what's really going on.

(Adapted from
www.hunffingtonpost.ca)