The day my son Laurie started kindergarten he renounced corduroy overalls with bibs and began wearing blue jeans with a belt; I watched him go off the first morning with the older girl next door, seeing clearly that an era of my life was ended, my sweet-voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me.

He came home the same way, the front door slamming open, his cap on the floor, and the voice suddenly become raucous shouting, “Isn’t anybody here?”

At lunch he spoke insolently to his father, spilled his baby sister’s milk, and remarked that his teacher said we were not to take the name of the Lord in vain.

“How was school today?” I asked, elaborately casual.

“All right,” he said.

“Did you learn anything?” his father asked.

Laurie regarded his father coldly. “I didn’t learn nothing,” he said.

“Anything,” I said. “Didn’t learn anything.”

“The teacher spanked a boy, though,” Laurie said, addressing his bread and butter. “For being fresh,” he added, with his mouth full.

“What did he do?” I asked. “Who was it?”

Laurie thought. “It was Charles,” he said. “He was fresh. The teacher spanked him and made him stand in a corner. He was awfully fresh.”

“What did he do?” I asked again, but Laurie slid off his chair, took a cookie, and left, while his father was still saying, “See here, young man.”

1. swaggering (swag’ gar in) v. strutting; walking with a bold step.
2. raucous (ro’ kas) adj. harsh; rough-sounding.

Vocabulary Builder
renounced (ri noun’sd) v. gave up

According to Laurie, how does Charles get into trouble at school?

Strategy for Less Proficient Readers
Tell students that this story has a surprise ending. Suggest that as they read students should look for clues in the story where the author hints at Charles’s real identity. Ask students to review their clues list periodically to predict the story’s ending.

Strategy for Advanced Readers
Have students read with the goal of preparing brief presentations on Shirley Jackson’s humor. Specifically, they should observe the ways in which Charles reveals the author’s comical style. Tell students to look for examples of irony and suspense in the story.

About the Selection
When Laurie returns home from his first day of kindergarten, he reports to his parents about a boy named Charles who got a spanking. As the days go by and the stories about Charles’s bad behavior continue, Laurie’s parents become concerned about the influence that this ill-mannered child is having on their son. With the story’s surprising conclusion, the mother arrives at an unexpected understanding about her son and herself.

Reading Check
Answer: Laurie says Charles got in trouble at school for being fresh.
**Reading Skill**

**Make Inferences**
- Have students reread this page, focusing on Laurie’s descriptions of Charles’s behavior.
- Ask students the Reading Skill question.
**Answer:** Laurie grins when he talks about Charles and he points out that although the teacher told everyone not to play with Charles they did anyway.
- Discuss with the class whether they have ever had a student like Charles in one of their classes. Did they dislike, admire, or fear that student, or did they have a different reaction to him or her?

**Literary Analysis**

**Point of View**
- Have a student read aloud the last five paragraphs on this page. Tell students to pay attention to the first-person point of view as they listen.
- Ask students the Literary Analysis question.
**Answer:** The narrator uses the words I and my. The narrator also describes her feelings, saying she waits anxiously for Laurie.
- Ask students how Laurie’s mother’s first-person narration affects our information about Charles.
**Answer:** Because the mother is narrating the story, the only information we get about Charles comes from what she observes and what her son tells her about him.

**Critical Viewing**

**Answer:** Students may suggest that the girl on the left with the bow in her hair might be like Charles because her expression is more expressive than those of the other children.

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**Vocabulary Development**

**Vocabulary Knowledge Rating**

Create a Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Chart for the selection you will teach from this set. Include the selection vocabulary from this page and the additional words students are asked to use at the end of Connecting to Literature. These words will increase students’ expressive vocabulary.

Give students a copy of the chart with the words on it. Introduce the words by reading them aloud and having students mark their rating in the Before Reading column. Urge them to be alert to these words as they read and discuss the selection because they will rate their knowledge of the words again after they finish.

If you wish, you may tally how many words students know (or think they know) to gauge how much instruction you need to provide. As students read, point out the words and their context.
through the door. “Charles yelled so in school they sent a boy
in from first grade to tell the teacher she had to make Charles
keep quiet, and so Charles had to stay after school. And so all
the children stayed to watch him.”

“What did he do?” I asked.

“He just sat there,” Laurie said, climbing into his chair at
the table. “Hi, Pop, y’old dust mop.”

“Charles had to stay after school today,” I told my husband.
“Everyone stayed with him.”

“What does this Charles look like?” my husband asked Lau-
rie. “What’s his other name?”

“He’s bigger than me,” Laurie said. “And he doesn’t have
any rubbers and he doesn’t ever wear a jacket.”

Monday night was the first Parent-Teachers meeting, and
only the fact that the baby had a cold kept me from going; I
wanted passionately to meet Charles’s mother. On Tuesday
Laurie remarked suddenly, “Our teacher had a friend come to
see her in school today.”

“Charles’s mother?” my husband and I asked
simultaneously.

“Naaah,” Laurie said scornfully. “It was a man who came
and made us do exercises, we had to touch our toes. Look.”
He climbed down from his chair and squatted down and
touched his toes. “Like this,” he said. He got solemnly back
into his chair and said, picking up his fork, “Charles didn’t
even do exercises.”

“That’s fine,” I said heartily. “Didn’t Charles want to do
exercises?”

“Naaah,” Laurie said. “Charles was so fresh to the teacher’s
friend he wasn’t let do exercises.”

“Fresh again?” I said.

“He kicked the teacher’s friend,” Laurie said. “The teacher’s
friend told Charles to touch his toes like I just did and Charles
kicked him.”

“What are they going to do about Charles, do you suppose?”
Laurie’s father asked him.

Laurie shrugged elaborately. “Throw him out of school, I
guess,” he said.

Wednesday and Thursday were routine; Charles yelled dur-
ing story hour and hit a boy in the stomach and made him
cry. On Friday Charles stayed after school again and so did all
the other children.

7 Reading Skill
Make Inferences
What actions show
that Charles’s
behavior is having a
negative effect on
Laurie?

Vocabulary Builder
simultaneously (sí’
mal tà’ nè as ɪ) adv.
at the same time

8 Reading Check
What did Check
Charles do to his teacher’s
friend?
With the third week of kindergarten Charles was an institution in our family; the baby was being a Charles when she cried all afternoon; Laurie did a Charles when he filled his wagon full of mud and pulled it through the kitchen; even my husband, when he caught his elbow in the telephone cord and pulled the telephone, ashtray, and a bowl of flowers off the table, said, after the first minute, “Looks like Charles.”

During the third and fourth weeks it looked like a reformation in Charles; Laurie reported grimly at lunch on Thursday of the third week, “Charles was so good today the teacher gave him an apple.”

“What?” I said, and my husband added warily, “You mean Charles?”

“Charles,” Laurie said. “He gave the crayons around and he picked up the books afterward and the teacher said he was her helper.”

“What happened?” I asked incredulously.

“He was her helper, that’s all,” Laurie said, and shrugged.

“Can this be true, about Charles?” I asked my husband that night. “Can something like this happen?”

“Wait and see,” my husband said cynically. “When you’ve got a Charles to deal with, this may mean he’s only plotting.” He seemed to be wrong. For over a week Charles was the teacher’s helper; each day he handed things out and he picked things up; no one had to stay after school.

“The PTA meeting’s next week again,” I told my husband one evening. “I’m going to find Charles’s mother there.”

“Ask her what happened to Charles,” my husband said. “I’d like to know.”

“I’d like to know myself,” I said.

On Friday of that week things were back to normal. “You know what Charles did today?” Laurie demanded at the lunch table, in a voice slightly awed. “He told a little girl to say a word and she said it and the teacher washed her mouth out with soap and Charles laughed.”

“What word?” his father asked unwisely, and Laurie said, “I’ll have to whisper it to you, it’s so bad.” He got down off his chair and went around to his father. His father bent his head down and Laurie whispered joyfully. His father’s eyes widened.

“Did Charles tell the little girl to say that?” he asked respectfully.

3. cynically (sin' i ka lè) adv. with disbelief about the honesty of people’s intentions or actions.

Vocabulary Knowledge Rating

When students have completed reading and discussing “Charles” have them take out their Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Chart for this selection. Read the words aloud once more and have students rate their knowledge of the words again in the After Reading column. Clarify any words that are still problematic. Have students write their own definition and example or sentence in the appropriate column. Then have students complete the Vocabulary Builder Practice activities on page 351. Encourage students to use the words in further discussion and in written work about this selection. Remind them that they will be accountable for these words on the Selection Test.
“She said it twice,” Laurie said. “Charles told her to say it twice.”

“What happened to Charles?” my husband asked.

“Nothing,” Laurie said. “He was passing out the crayons.”

Monday morning Charles abandoned the little girl and said the evil word himself three or four times, getting his mouth washed out with soap each time. He also threw chalk.

My husband came to the door with me that evening as I set out for the PTA meeting. “Invite her over for a cup of tea after the meeting,” he said. “I want to get a look at her.”

“If only she’s there,” I said prayerfully.

“She’ll be there,” my husband said. “I don’t see how they could hold a PTA meeting without Charles’s mother.”

At the meeting I sat restlessly, scanning each comfortable matronly face, trying to determine which one hid the secret of Charles. None of them looked to me haggard enough. No one stood up in the meeting and apologized for the way her son had been acting. No one mentioned Charles.

After the meeting I identified and sought out Laurie’s kindergarten teacher. She had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of chocolate cake; I had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of marshmallow cake. We maneuvered up to one another cautiously, and smiled.

“I’ve been so anxious to meet you,” I said. “I’m Laurie’s mother.”

“We’re all so interested in Laurie,” she said.

“Well, he certainly likes kindergarten,” I said. “He talks about it all the time.”

“We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so,” she said primly, “but now he’s a fine little helper. With occasional lapses, of course.”

“Laurie usually adjusts very quickly,” I said. “I suppose this time it’s Charles’s influence.”

“Charles?”

“Yes,” I said, laughing. “you must have your hands full in that kindergarten, with Charles.”

“Charles?” she said. “We don’t have any Charles in the kindergarten.”

**Reading Skill**

**Make Inferences**

What does Charles’s behavior on Monday suggest about his good behavior in the previous weeks?

**Answer:** Most students will say they are very surprised.

**Ask** students the Reading Skill question.

**Answer:** His return to bad behavior on Monday indicates that his previous good behavior was just a lapse.

**Ask** students whether they were surprised at the positive change that has taken place in Charles’s behavior.

**Answer:** His return to bad behavior on Monday indicates that his previous good behavior was just a lapse.

**As a class, predict whether or not Charles will continue behaving badly or return to his “new and improved” behavior.**

**Literary Analysis**

**Point of View**

How does the first-person point of view contribute to the humor in this conversation?

**Answer:** The mother is laughing when she talks about Charles, showing that she really has no idea who he is. This sets up the humor of the final line of the story, where the truth about Charles is revealed.

**Ask** students to write a sentence to add to the story to show the narrator’s reaction to the final line of the story.

**Answer:** She would be surprised, confused, suspicious, and then horrified as the truth slowly dawned on her.

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**Concept Connector**

**Anticipation Guide**

Have students return to their Anticipation Guides and respond to the statements again in the After Reading column. They may do this individually or in their original pairs or groups. Then, lead a class discussion, probing for what students have learned that confirms or invalidates each statement. Encourage students to cite specific details, quotations, or other evidence from the text to support their responses.

**Connecting to the Literature**

**• Have students review the advice they wrote for kindergartners before reading with their thoughts now. How would they modify that advice now?**

**Reading Skill Graphic Organizer**

**• Ask to review the graphic organizers they completed to make inferences while reading. Show them Reading Skill Graphic Organizer (Graphic Organizer Transparencies, p. 68). Then have students share the graphic organizers they did and the inferences they made about Laurie.**