

CHOICES: Building Your Portfolio

Writer's Notebook

1. Collecting Ideas for a Character Analysis

How do they change, and why? A good strategy to use



for analyzing a character is to identify how the character changes—from your first glimpse of the person at the story's beginning to your last look at him or her at the end. Select a character from "The First Seven Years" or from another story, and take notes on how he or she changes in the course of the story. What does your character learn or discover by the story's end?

How have the character's feelings changed? What has caused this change? Be sure you assess the change—is it believable? Save your notes for possible use in the Writer's Workshop on page 164.

Creative Writing

2. What Does Miriam Think?

Rewrite any key event in this story from Miriam's **point of view**. Miriam might describe one of her dates with Max or report a conversation with Feld or describe her feelings for Sobel. Write as "I," as Miriam. You may want to write a **journal entry** or a **letter**. If you write a journal entry, be sure to make up a date. If you write a letter, make it clear whom Miriam is writing to. Read aloud your interpretations of Miriam's feelings, and respond to your classmates' interpretations. Are there differences of opinion?

Creative Writing

3. "When two years had passed . . ."

The ending of this love story is not entirely clear. Sobel appears to be willing to wait for two more years before asking Miriam to marry him. In two years, though, many things can change. In a paragraph, tell what you think might happen to Miriam and Sobel in the next two years.


Research/Social Studies

4. Reporting on an Immigrant Culture

Although Malamud does not locate this story specifically on the Lower East Side, his characters could have been among the millions of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who lived in this poor neighborhood in New York City in the early and middle years of the twentieth century. Using your library, the Internet, and electronic databases, prepare a brief **informal talk** on Jewish immigrant life in New York City. After you gather your data, you'll have to narrow your focus to a manageable topic. Be sure to tell what you learned from Malamud's text. Ask your audience for feedback. Was your presentation clear and focused?

●	Girl in "Boys and Girls"
	Big change: First likes men's work and hates her mother's household work.
●	Discovery: that the men's work is brutal.
	Cause: killing of beloved horse. Other causes??
●	Believable? Yes! Girl's feelings seem true to me from start to finish.

LANGUAGE LINK MINI-LESSON


**Handbook of
Literary
Terms
HELP**
See Dialect.

Dialect—How We Speak

A **dialect** is a form of a language spoken in a specific region (Maine, Appalachia, Brooklyn) or by a particular group of people. For example, if you pronounce *Mary*, *marry*, and *merry* exactly the same way, you are probably from the Midwest. If you are from the Northeast, you probably pronounce each word differently.

Besides differences in pronunciation, dialects are distinguished by differences in vocabulary and **syntax** (the way words are organized in a sentence). The dialect of a particular ethnic group usually contains traces of the syntax of the group's native language.

A Russian immigrant might omit the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a* because in Russian those forms do not exist. ("He has big house in country.")

A French-speaking Haitian immigrant might add unnecessary articles because articles are used more often in French than in English. ("Do you know where is the Fifth Avenue?")

In "The First Seven Years," Feld and Sobel speak the English dialect of their ethnic group—Polish Jews whose native languages are Polish and Yiddish.

Try It Out

Find at least five examples in this story in which a character uses **syntax** that is not Standard English syntax. Rewrite these passages in Standard English. What does the use of Standard English change about the character?

A tip for writers: When you write dialogue, try to make it sound like your characters' real speech. When you reproduce dialect, you must try to make the speech sound authentic, but you must also avoid seeming to mock the characters. Malamud writes accurate dialect without ever seeming to belittle his characters.

VOCABULARY HOW TO OWN A WORD

WORD BANK

reverie
discerned
illiterate
unscrupulous
profuse
sanctified
repugnant
deft
pallid
devious

Word Charts: All You Need to Know

Work with a partner or small group to make a chart of basic information about each word in the Word Bank. You will have to use a **dictionary**. Hint: If you can't find a word's origin, try looking up the **root word** (*scruple* instead of *unscrupulous*, for example).

<i>discerned</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning: "recognized"; "perceived" • Origin: Latin <i>dis-</i>, "apart," and <i>cernere</i>, "to separate" • Related words: <i>discernible</i> and <i>discerning</i> (adj.); <i>discernibly</i> (adv.); <i>discernment</i> (n.) • Examples (things that can be discerned): light, colors, smells, tastes, cold, or heat; when a friend is upset; when someone is frightened