

Name: _____ Teacher: _____ School: _____

Grade 7: Lesson 19 Use "His Motto" to build knowledge about life during the early 1900s and focus on how setting, characters, and plot interact to tell a story.

"His Motto"
By Lottie Burrell Dixon

Part I

"But I can't leave my business affairs and go off on a fishing trip now."

The friend and specialist who had tricked John Durmont into a confession of physical bankruptcy, and made him submit to an examination in spite of himself, now sat back with an "I wash my hands of you" gesture.

"Very well, you can either go to Maine, now, at once, or you'll go to—well, as I'm only your spiritual adviser, my prognostications as to your ultimate destination would probably have very little weight with you."

"Oh, well, if you are so sure, I suppose I can cut loose now, if it comes to a choice like that.

"The doctor smiled his satisfaction. " So you prefer to bear the ills of New York than to fly to others you know not of, eh?"

"Oh, have a little mercy on Shakespeare, at least. I'll go."

And thus it was that a week later found Durmont as deep in the Maine woods as he could get and still be within reach of a telegraph wire. And much to his surprise he found he liked it.

As he lay stretched at full length on the soft turf, the breath of the pines filled his lungs, the lure of the lake made him eager to get to his fishing tackle, and he admitted to himself that a man needed just such a holiday as this in order to keep his mental and physical balance.

Returning to the gaily painted frame building, called by courtesy the "Hotel," which nestled among the pines, he met the youthful operator from the near-by station looking for him with a message from his broker. A complicated situation had arisen in Amalgamated Copper, and an immediate answer was needed. Durmont had heavy investments in copper, though his business was the manufacture of electrical instruments.

He walked back to the office with the operator while pondering the answer, then having written it, handed it to the operator saying, "Tell them to rush answer."

The tall lank youth, whose every movement was a protest against being hurried, dragged himself over to the telegraph key.

"S open."

"What's open?"

"Wire."

"Well, is that the only wire you have?"

"Yep."

"What in the world am I going to do about this message?"

"Dunno, maybe it will close bime-by." And the young lightning slinger pulled towards him a lurid tale of the Wild West, and proceeded to enjoy himself.

"And meanwhile, what do you suppose is going to happen to me?" thundered Durmont. "Haven't you ambition enough to look around your wire and see if you can find the trouble?"

"Lineman's paid to look up trouble; I'm not," was the surly answer.

Durmont was furious, but what he was about to say was cut off by a quiet voice at his elbow.

"I noticed linemen repairing wires upon the main road, that's where this wire is open. If you have any message you are in a hurry to send, perhaps I can help you out.

"Durmont turned to see a colored boy of fifteen whose entrance he had not noticed.

"What can you do about it?" he asked contemptuously, "take it into town in an ox team?"

"I can send it by wireless, if that is sufficiently quick.

"Durmont turned to the operator at the table.

"Is there a wireless near here?"

"He owns one, you'll have to do business with him on that," said the youth with a grin at Durmont's unconcealed prejudice.

It would be hard to estimate the exact amount of respect, mingled with surprise, with which the city man now looked at the boy whose information he had evidently doubted till confirmed by the white boy.

"Suppose you've got some kind of tom-fool contraption that will take half a day to get a message into the next village. Here I stand to lose several thousands because this blame company runs only one wire down to this camp. Where is this apparatus of yours? Might as well look at it while I'm waiting for this one-wire office to get into commission again."

"It's right up on top of the hill," answered the colored boy. "Here, George, I brought down this wireless book if you want to look it over, it's better worth reading than that stuff you have there," and tossing a book on the table he went out, followed by Durmont.

A couple of minutes' walk brought them in sight of the sixty-foot aerial erected on the top of a small shack.

"Not much to look at, but I made it all myself."

"How did you happen to construct this?" And Durmont really tried to keep the emphasis off the "you."

"Well, I'm interested in all kinds of electrical experiments, and have kept up reading and studying ever since I left school, then when I came out here on my uncle's farm, he let me rig up this wireless, and I can talk to a chum of mine down in the city. And when I saw the wire at the station was gone up, I thought I might possibly get your message to New York through him."

Source: Dixon, Lottie Burell. "His Motto." *The Upward Path*. Ed. Myron T. Pritchard and Mary White Covington. Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920. Project Gutenberg. Web. Public domain.

Note catcher:

<u>Setting</u>	
<u>Character</u>	<u>Description</u>
<u>Plot</u>	

Independent Practice:

Write some ideas about this question: What possible themes (messages to the reader) do you see emerging in the text so far?

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