

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 19, “His Motto”

Lesson Focus: The lesson focuses on a short story from the Harlem Renaissance called “His Motto.”

Practice Focus: Students will take notes on the setting, characters, and plot.

Objective: Students will 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.

Academic Vocabulary: telegraph, physical bankruptcy, “I wash my hands of you,” prognostications, broker, ambition, surly, contemptuously, tom-fool, apparatus

TN Standards: 7.RL.KID.1, 7.RL.KID.2, 7.RL.KID.3, 7.RL.CS.4, 7.W.PDW.4

Teacher Materials:

- The Teacher Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 19

Student Materials:

- Paper, pencil, surface to write on
- The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 19 which can be found at www.tn.gov/education

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 minute)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 7th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the fourth in this week’s series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at www.tn.gov/education . You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others. But it might be more fun if you first go back and watch our other lessons, since today we’ll be talking about things we learned previously.</p> <p>Today we will be learning about a short story called “His Motto.” It was written by a woman named Lottie Burrell Dixon during the Harlem Renaissance. Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper, pencil, surface to write on • The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 19 which can be found at www.tn.gov/education <p>Ok, let’s begin!</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>
<p>Intro (3 min)</p> <p>We have been studying the Harlem Renaissance period, a time in the 1920s and 1930s in the United States where there was a growth of intellectual, literary, and artistic work from African Americans. Last time we read and analyzed a poem</p>	<p>Students recall key ideas and themes from the Harlem Renaissance from previous texts, such as “Called Dreams.”</p>

<p>by Georgia Douglas Johnson titled “Called Dreams.” We learned that in the poem, Johnson told a story of a speaker who wanted to pursue her dreams despite other forces trying to stop her, and that with determination, she would overcome any obstacles. She used structural techniques such as writing in couplets and rhymes to emphasize different ideas. Her use of precise word choices like “contraband” and “morning break” conveyed negative or positive feelings to develop the themes.</p> <p>Today our goal is to continue our study of the Harlem Renaissance by reading part one of a short story that takes place in the same time period. We will focus on the characters and setting, and how these elements affect the plot. We will begin with me showing you what that looks like, and then there will be time for you to practice on your own with my support. Finally, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</p> <p>Before we begin reading, I will give you some background information because it will help us understand some basic things in the story we may be unfamiliar with. Remember this story takes place about 100 years ago, so the world was very different. This story takes place before the use of telephones or internet, and characters will use the telegraph to communicate. Before the telephone, people could send messages along wires using electrical pulses. Operators on either end received the messages either by listening to a series of beeps or operating a printer that decoded these beeps. You might have heard of the Morse Code – long and short beeps. Here is a picture of what that looked like. [Show Slide 1.]</p> <p>There were also wireless systems, which could send messages using radio waves, and these were especially useful if the regular telegraph lines were not usable. This is what it looked like. [Show Slide 2.]</p> <p>Also, part of this story is set in Maine. The setting of Maine has many rural and natural areas to visit, which is very different from New York City. Therefore, when one of the main characters, Durmont, leaves New York for Maine, he is going to a very different kind of community. Here are two images to show you the difference between the two settings. [Show Slide 3.]</p>	<p>Students prepare to follow the gradual-release trajectory, understanding that they will be doing more listening at first and more “doing” toward the end of the lesson.</p>
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (14 min) Let’s create a note-catcher to capture the key details about the setting, characters and plot, since we want to focus today</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g.,</p>

on how those elements interact to help us understand the story. On one page, I will make my note-catcher like this: [Show Slide 4.]

You can use the whole page to draw your note-catcher so you have plenty of space. Be sure to make 4 rows under "character" and "description." [Pause.]

On another paper, make note-catcher like this: [Show Slide 5.] [Pause.] Yes, that is all for this note-catcher. I'll show you in a bit what to do track the plot.

Now we are ready to begin the story, "His Motto." Do you know what a motto is? [Pause.] It's a phrase or sentence that captures some guiding beliefs or values about how someone lives their life. Here are some mottos you may have heard or seen before: [Show Slide 6.]

- You only live once.
- Live. Laugh. Love.
- Dream big.
- Be yourself.
- Keep calm and carry on.

The title of the story is "His Motto," so I'm thinking whatever that motto is will be important to understanding the central ideas and themes of the story. Ok. Let's get started. [Show Slide 7.]

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.

So, what is going on here? There are two people- a specialist and John Durmont. I think a specialist here is some sort of doctor because he did an examination on John Durmont. So, that means John Durmont doesn't want to go fishing even though he confessed he had physical bankruptcy.

Bankruptcy is when you have no money left, so *physical* bankruptcy means that John Durmont has no...strength? Energy? That makes sense. Durmont is stressed and exhausted from his business. "I wash my hands of you" is a saying that means "I'm not responsible for what happens

definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.

Students identify key ideas about the setting, characters and plot, and record them in a note-catcher.

now” because the doctor has already said Durmont needs a break.

Let’s keep reading. [Show Slide 8.]

"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 [or predictions] 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."

The doctor says he has prognostications, or predictions, about what Durmont’s “ultimate destination” will be if he doesn’t go to Maine. Since Durmont is stressed out, if he doesn’t take this vacation, he might get worse and die! That makes him agree to take a vacation to Maine after all.

Let’s pause and make a couple of notes about the characters. We have John Durmont, who is a stressed and exhausted businessman who needs a break, and the specialist who is concerned about Durmont’s health and wants him to take a vacation. I’ll jot this down under characters. [Show Slide 9.]

Take a moment to jot these notes on your note-catcher. [Pause.]

This seems like a good place to write a significant event. The dialogue between Durmont and the specialist causes Durmont to travel to Maine, where the rest of this story takes place. I’ll add this to my plot map, making sure to be as brief and clear as possible. [Show Slide 10.]

It’s easiest if you write the notes first, and then draw a box around your sentence. I’ll give you a few moments to jot this down. [Pause for students to write.]

[Show Slide 11.] 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. [Pause.]

Durmont sounds like he is glad he took this break, but you know what? I notice he still wants to be near a telegraph wire, probably to communicate with the business since he probably still worries about what's going on there. Let's write the setting on our note-catcher. [Show Slide 12.] [Pause.]

Let's keep reading. [Show Slide 13.]

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, or agent. 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." [Pause.]

Well, that didn't take long for his vacation to be interrupted! There's some sort of issue at Amalgamated Copper, which was a mining company at the time, so now he must get a message back to them through the telegraph. I'm going to add this new setting. [Show Slide 14.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 15.] 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. [Pause.]

Wow. The telegraph isn't working because the wire is open, meaning it isn't connected, and the youth in the office doesn't seem to be a useful sort of person. Kind of lazy and unhelpful if you ask me. The author says here that he "dragged" himself and his movement showed he didn't want to hurry. And at the end he just sits back to read a story! [Show Slide 16.]

"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 (or irritable) answer. [Pause.]

Durmont is really angry now. He accuses the youth of having no ambition. Ambition is the motivation and desire to improve. Let's add this youth character to our note-catcher. I'll give you a moment to copy this down. [Show Slide 17.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 18.] [Pause.] Now jot this plot point on our note-catcher. Notice I am drawing an arrow in between the events to show how the plot progresses. Remember to write the words before drawing the box.

[Show Slide 19.] 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.

[Pause.] Ooh, there's a new character – a 15 year-old African American boy – offering to help Durmont send his message. Durmont didn't even notice him coming because he was so engrossed in his argument with the youth. Let's read what happens. [Show Slide 20.]

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

Durmont is being rather sarcastic and rude to the African American boy. He's really looking down at him like the boy is unworthy of his time. That must be what contemptuously means – in a very rude, disrespectful way.

"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. [Pause.]

I am kind of impressed with this young boy because he talks calmly and respectfully to Durmont, even though Durmont didn't take him seriously just because he is black. It's only when the white youth told him he would have to talk to the black boy about the wireless telegraph that Durmont understand the boy was telling the truth. I'm going to jot some of this down about the characters. For Durmont, he is prejudiced against the African American boy. This is disappointing, but it seems to be consistent with what we were learning earlier this week about the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance. African Americans weren't treated fairly and there was a lot of discrimination against them. And despite Durmont's unkindness, the boy is quiet and seems helpful. Oh, but I don't know his name yet. I guess for now I'll just write African American boy until I find out. [Show Slide 21.] [Pause.] Go ahead and write down these notes.

[Show Slide 22.] "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." [Pause.]

How do you think Durmont feels now? [Pause.] Yes, I agree. He's still looking down at the boy. He calls the boy's wireless telegraph a "tom-fool" contraption like its some ridiculous toy. There's still no respect here, even though Durmont reluctantly goes to see the wireless telegraph. Just more evidence of his prejudice. Let's continue.

"Its 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. [Pause.]

Hmm, I wonder if Durmont realizes at this point the boy knows how to read. We know this because he gives George, the white youth, a book about wireless telegraphs. I wonder if that's how the boy learned how to use a wireless telegraph. [Pause.]

A couple of min' 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." [Pause.]

On the right side, there is an image of what this aerial could have looked like. What does it remind you of? [Pause.] Yes, it reminds me of cell phone towers or electricity towers, and this was over one hundred years ago! Can you imagine this on top of a small shack? It's pretty impressive. Let's finish up part 1 of our story.

[Show Slide 23.] "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." [Pause.]

What new information have you learned about the characters in this part of the story? Take a minute to jot some thoughts. [Pause.]

<p>Did you add something like this? [Show Slide 24.] I was thinking the same thing, that the boy is proud of himself because he built the wireless telegraph and tower by himself. And he uses it to talk to a friend in New York. No wonder he thought he could help Durmont! Anything else you thought of? [Pause.] Ok, so you noticed Durmont might be trying to be nicer because the text said he tried not to emphasize you. Yes, it sounds different to say, “How did <i>you</i> happen to construct?” Because that sounds like you don’t believe the boy is capable of doing something so amazing. I’m not sure why he did this, though. Maybe we’ll find out tomorrow. Take a moment to finish up any notes for this section. [Show Slide 25.] [Pause.]</p> <p>Let’s look at our plot map. [Show Slide 26.] Oh, we only have two events here and it doesn’t include the part we just read. So, what’s the main event that happened here? [Pause.] Right, a black boy offers to help Durmont deliver his message, and Durmont reluctantly agrees to go with him. Add that to the plot map: A black boy offers to help Durmont deliver his message, and Durmont reluctantly agrees to go with him. [Show Slide 27.]</p>	
<p>Guided Practice (8 min)</p> <p>Now that we’ve finished reading part one, let’s go back and consider more carefully the interactions between the characters, setting, and plot. These elements all work together to tell the story.</p> <p>Here’s the first scene of the story. [Show Slide 28.]</p> <p>How does conversation between Durmont and his doctor influence the plot? To answer this question, I want to think about the content of the conversation and how it causes events to happen. In this scene, the doctor shares his worries about Durmont’s health due to his work. In fact, he’s concerned Durmont might even die, which is what finally persuades Durmont to take the vacation. So, this conversation is the spark that causes Durmont to even be in an isolated place Maine, the main setting of the story, in the first place – to relax. Take a minute to write down this question and answer. Notice my answer doesn’t have to be extensive at this point. I just wrote, “This conversation causes Durmont to take a vacation to Maine to relax.” [Show Slide 29.] [Pause.]</p> <p>In scene 2, Durmont needs to send a message to his broker in New York, but finds out the telegraph wire is broken. What is the youth’s reaction to Durmont’s situation? [Show Slide</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p> <p>Students identify how the setting, characters, and plot work together to advance the story.</p>

<p>30.] This scene is too long to show on one page, so you may need to consult your note-catcher for clues so you can write your response. [Pause.]</p> <p>Good work consulting your notes! Your response looks similar to this: [Show Slide 31.]</p> <p>At first, the youth is just lazy and unhelpful, but then he becomes surly when Durmont insists that he fix the wire.</p> <p>[Show Slide 32.] This is the part of the story where the African American boy is introduced.</p> <p>What is Durmont’s reaction to the African American boy’s offer to help? Write your response after consulting your notes and scanning. [Pause.]</p> <p>[Show Slide 33.] Great job! Durmont is contemptuous and sarcastic about the boy having to take an ox team to New York. He seems prejudiced against the boy because he is black.</p> <p>How does the African American boy’s offer to help affect the plot? [Pause.] [Show Slide 34.]</p> <p>Exactly! Durmont, despite his prejudice, agrees to come with him to deliver the message. It might give him a chance to change his mind about the boy.</p> <p>Last question for today: Why is the setting important to the plot? Consult your note-catcher to help you answer this question on your paper. [Pause.]</p> <p>You likely responded this way: [Show Slide 35.] The setting of Maine is important because it is isolated with few options to communicate. When Durmont can’t send his message by telegraph, he must find another way, so he is forced to interact with the black boy.</p>	
<p>Independent Work (3 min)</p> <p>We are just about out of time for today. Thank you so much for taking a deep dive into part one of “His Motto”. I have one more thing I’d like to ask you to do today.</p> <p>[Show Slide 36.] For independent practice after the episode, write some ideas about this question: “What possible themes do you see emerging in the text so far?” Students please copy down the independent practice so you have the assignment when the video ends.</p>	<p>Students brainstorm ideas about possible themes in “His Motto” in preparation for the conclusion of the story in the next lesson.</p>

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<p>You have your note-catcher that has your notes about the setting, characters, and plot, and you can use it to brainstorm possible themes. Remember a theme is the message the author wants to convey to you, the reader. I'm sure you have plenty of ideas so far, and we'll see you next time to learn what happens in the rest of the story!</p>	
<p>Closing (1 minute) I enjoyed working on "His Motto" with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee's At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	

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