

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 20, “His Motto”

**Lesson Focus:** The lesson focuses on the short story, “His Motto.”

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

**Objective:** Students will analyze how a theme develops in “His Motto” through setting, characters, plot, and point of view.

**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.RL.CS.6, 7.W.TTP.2, 7.W.PDW.4

**Teacher Materials:**

- The Teacher Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 20

**Student Materials:**

- Paper, pencil, surface to write on
- Note-catchers from previous lesson
- The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 20 which can be found on [www.tn.gov/education](http://www.tn.gov/education)

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p><b>Opening</b> (1 min)</p> <p><b>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 7<sup>th</sup> graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the fifth in this week’s series.</b></p> <p><b>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!</b></p> <p><b>If you didn’t see our previous lessons, you can find them at <a href="http://www.tn.gov/education">www.tn.gov/education</a>. 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.</b></p> <p><b>Today we will be learning about the short story “His Motto.” Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper, pencil, surface to write on</li> <li>• Note-catchers from previous lesson</li> <li>• The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 20 which can be found on <a href="http://www.tn.gov/education">www.tn.gov/education</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Ok, let’s begin!</b></p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>
<p><b>Intro</b> (2 min)</p> <p><b>In the previous lesson, we read the first half of “His Motto,” by Lottie Burrell Dixon. In this story, we follow a man named John Durmont, a New York businessman, to the state of Maine, where he is taking a fishing vacation on his doctor’s</b></p>	<p>Students recall the elements of the story addressed by the previous lesson, return to the independent work they completed after the previous lesson, and prepare to build</p>

<p>recommendation. He has to deal with a business problem and communicate with his broker in New York. Unfortunately for him, the telegraph wire is broken. A young black boy offers to send the message by a wireless telegraph for him, but Durmont is prejudiced against him because he is black. However, Durmont goes with the boy, since he has no other options. When we left the story yesterday, Durmont had just learned the boy had actually built his own wireless telegraph and tower. After the episode, you brainstormed some possible emerging themes, or messages for the reader. What did you come up with? [Pause.]</p> <p>Those are all good ideas: [Show Slide 1.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You shouldn't be prejudiced.</li> <li>• You can teach yourself new things.</li> <li>• Be nice to people who are trying to help you.</li> <li>• Work hard – don't be lazy.</li> </ul> <p>Let's see if any of these themes develop in the rest of the story, or if another one emerges.</p> <p>Today our goal is to finish reading "His Motto" and analyze how various story elements and point of view develop a theme, or message to the reader. 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>We will need a new note-catcher today. It looks like this. [Show Slide 2.] Take a minute now to copy that down on your paper, making sure you give yourself space to write in each box. [Pause.]</p> <p>Let's begin!</p>	<p>on that work in today's lesson on character, point of view, and theme.</p> <p>Students prepare to follow the gradual-release trajectory and create the note-catcher they will use to organize their learning throughout the lesson.</p>
<p><b>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud</b> (15 min) [Show Slide 3.] <b>Part II</b></p> <p><b>They had entered the one-room shack which contained a long table holding a wireless outfit, a couple of chairs and a shelf of books. On the walls were tacked pictures of aviators and drawings of aeroplanes. A three-foot model of a biplane hung in a corner.</b> [Pause.]</p> <p>The setting has shifted in this part of the story, so we are now in the boy's home. The author describes the home as a one-room shack with little furniture in it. Just some chairs, a shelf of books, pictures, drawings, and models of airplanes and</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text with the teacher's support, and take notes as directed to develop an understanding of the two characters' evolving points of view.</p>

pilots. Hmm. What does this description reveal to me about the boy? [Pause.] I think the description shows even though he may not have a lot in his shack, what he does have – his books and aviation pictures and drawings – show the boy is curious and creative. I’m going to add that to my note-catcher about characters, the same one we used last time. If you missed the previous lesson or don’t have this note catcher anymore, that’s okay—you can just focus on the one we’re making today. [Show Slide 4.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 5.] "Now if he is only in," said the boy, going over to the table and giving the call.

"He's there," he said eagerly, holding out his hand for the message.

Durmont handed it to him. His face still held the look of doubt and disbelief as he looked at the crude, home-made instruments.

"Suppose I might as well have hired a horse and taken it into town." But the sputtering wire drowned his voice. [Pause.]

I notice here the boy and Durmont have two different points of view about sending this message. The boy is eager to send the message and confident he will succeed. On the other hand, Durmont seems like he’s second guessing his decision to follow the boy. He sees the home-made instruments and thinks they can’t possibly work. He thinks it would have been better if he just went back into the city himself. I’m going to record these details on the point of view note-catcher. [Show Slide 6.] [Pause.]

Okay, let’s see what happens. [Show Slide 7.]

"And get on your wheel and go like blazes. Tell 'em to rush answer. This guy here thinks a colored boy is only an animated shoe-blackening outfit; it's up to us to remedy that defect in his education, see!" Thus sang the wires as Durmont paced the floor. [Pause.]

We get more clues about the boy’s point of view in this dialogue. He tells his friend to hurry on his bike to deliver the messages. The boy knows Durmont doesn’t believe in him because he’s just a black boy, but he wants to prove him Wrong. See where it says “it’s up to us to remedy that defect in his education, see!”? The word “remedy” means to fix, and the word “defect” means a flaw. Actually the boy thinks it’s

their duty to show Durmont that his thinking is wrong and he's determined to do so. He knows that Durmont is prejudiced against him and decides to educate Durmont so that he will be less prejudiced. I should add these details on the point of view note-catcher. [Show Slide 8.] Your turn to write it down in your note-catcher. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 9.] "I said," began the nervous man as the wires became quiet. "I—" again the wire sputtered, and he couldn't hear himself talk. When it was quiet, he tried again, but as soon as he began to grumble, the wire began to sputter. He glanced suspiciously at the boy, but the latter was earnestly watching his instruments. [Pause.]

"Say," shouted Durmont, "does that thing have to keep up that confounded racket all the time?" [Pause.] What does confounded racket mean? Hmm. Well, the previous paragraphs describe how the wires are working, singing, and sputtering – so those are noises. Durmont keeps trying to talk over these sounds, and I think he's getting irritated, so confounded racket must mean irritating noises.

"I had to give him some instructions, you know, and also keep in adjustment."

"Well, I'll get out of adjustment myself if that keeps up."  
[Pause.]

The author uses the word adjustment twice here, but it doesn't mean the same thing each time. What do the boy and Durmont each mean when they talk about "adjustment?" [Pause.] Yes, you've got it! The boy is just moving the pieces of the telegraph instrument so it works properly, but Durmont is warning that he's getting impatient and upset with all the noise.

[Show Slide 10.] Durmont resigned himself to silence, and strangely enough, so did the wire. Walking around the room he noticed over the shelf of books a large white sheet on which was printed in gilt letters:

"I WILL STUDY AND MAKE READY, AND MAYBE MY CHANCE WILL COME." —ABRAHAM LINCOLN. [Pause.]

Wait a minute. I'm going to read that again. "I will study and make ready, and maybe my chance will come." That sounds like a ... what was that word? Yes, a motto! I better pay even closer attention now to the story details!

Durmont read this, and then looked at the boy as if seeing him for the first time. Again he looked at the words, and far beyond them he saw his own struggling boyhood, climbing daily Life's slippery path, trying to find some hold by which to pull himself up. And as he watched the brown-skinned boy bending over the instruments, instinct told him here was one who would find it still harder to fight his way up, because of caste. [Pause.]

Wow. This is significant. We learn here that Durmont used to struggle when he was young and now he's reminded of that when looking at the boy working so hard. And he's starting to think about the boy's caste, which in this case means his place in society because of his race, and how it might make life hard for the boy. He's actually beginning to think about the boy as a person, and sympathize with him! Let me jot this down the plot map. [Show Slide 11.] Take a few moments to copy that onto your own plot map.

Hmm, let's see how this affects how he talks to the boy now.

[Show Slide 12.] "Ah!"

The exclamation startled him.

The boy with phones adjusted was busily writing.

"Well, has that partner of yours got that message down at his end yet?"

"Yes, sir, and here is your answer from New York."

"Why it's only been half an hour since I wrote it," said Durmont.

"Yes, that horse wouldn't have got into town yet," grinned the boy.

Durmont snatched the paper, read it, and threw his cap in the air, exclaiming, "The day is saved. Boy, you're a winner. How much?" putting his hand in his pocket suggestively.

[Pause.] It worked! Durmont is so surprised that it was only 30 minutes that he had to wait to get a message sent and receive a message back. And the boy shows that he heard Durmont mutter earlier about how he should have just gotten a horse instead. He is sure proud of himself! Durmont is so

happy, he even wants to pay the boy. Notice how he puts his hand in his pocket like he's getting money? I'm going to write that Durmont is grateful and the boy is ... proud. Maybe also satisfied because he actually proved Durmont wrong about African American people. Get your point of view note-catcher to jot this down. [Show Slide 13.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 14.] "How much you owe to my help, I don't know," answered the lad sagely [or wisely]. "I offered to help you because you needed it, and I was glad of the chance to prove what I believed I could do. I'm satisfied because I succeeded." [Pause.]

Are you as surprised? With such a small room, I thought the boy would be pleased to be paid a little bit. He just did it to be helpful and to show he could be successful with no expectation to be paid. Wow. I'm going to add this about the boy on the point of view chart. [Show Slide 15.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 16.] Durmont sat down heavily on the other chair; his nerves couldn't stand much more in one afternoon. To find himself threatened with a large financial loss; to have this averted by the help of the scientific knowledge of a colored boy, and that boy rating the fact of his success higher than any pecuniary compensation— he had to pull himself together a bit.

What does pecuniary compensation mean? [Pause.] Right, you figured that out because we know the boy doesn't care about getting paid for helping Durmont. Pecuniary compensation is a payment using money. What's Durmont thinking now? [Pause.] Yes, he is shocked, too, with everything that's happened today with the business, a black boy that he didn't believe could save the day, and now he doesn't even want to be paid! Durmont has to think about all this some more since it's so unexpected to him. Let's see what he figures out. Before we continue the story, we should write down the big event that happened here on the plot map. [Show Slide 17.]

[Show Slide 18.] His eyes fell on the motto on the wall. He read it thoughtfully, considered how hard the boy had worked because of that, his hopes of the future based on that; saw the human element in him as it had not appealed to him before, and then turning something over in his mind, muttered to himself, "It's nobody's business if I do."

He got up, and walking over to the boy said: "What's your name?"

"Robert Hilton." [Pause.] Finally, we have a name for the boy. Do you have any thoughts about why we learn his name at this point in the story? [Pause.] You are absolutely right! This is the point in the story that Durmont finally and truly sees Robert as a person deserving of respect as a human being. Before he was just a boy, not even important enough to have a name. Let's jot that down about Durmont in the point of view note-catcher. [Show Slide 19.] [Pause.]

[Show Slide 20.] "Well, Robert, that motto you've got up there is a pretty good one to tie to. You certainly have studied; you have made yourself ready as far as your resources will permit, and I'll be hanged if I don't stand for the 'chance.' In the manufacturing of electrical instruments you could have great opportunity for inventive talent, and in my concern you shall have your chance, and go as far as your efficiency will carry you. What do you say, would you care for it?" [Pause.]

What's Durmont saying here? [Pause.] Yes, he's impressed with what Robert has done to teach himself with what he had and recognizes his hard work, so he's offering him a job! The phrase "in my concern" must mean Durmont's company since that's where Robert is getting a chance. And "efficiency" in this sentence refers to Robert's hard work and determination, which we know from the story he has plenty of.

[Show Slide 21.] "I'd care for it more than any other thing on earth, and am very grateful for the chance."

"The chance wouldn't be standing here now if you had not had the inclination and the determination to live up to those words on the wall."

[Pause.] Okay, students, let's wrap up the point of view note-catcher and the plot map. Take out your point of view note-catcher. What can we say about Durmont's and Robert's points of view at the end of the story? [Pause.] Good thinking! Durmont now respects Robert's hard work and determination, now that he isn't just thinking about himself and his problems. And I think that Robert, who's been hoping for a chance all this time, is very appreciative of the chance. But, I think he knows changing prejudicial attitudes is hard.

<p><b>Take a minute to write these last notes.</b> [Show Slide 22.] [Pause.]</p> <p><b>Now let's summarize the last part of the story. What do you think we should write?</b> [Pause.] <b>Lots of ways we can say it, but yours probably looks like something like this:</b> [Show Slide 23.] [Pause.]</p>	
<p><b>Guided Practice</b> (10 min)</p> <p><b>Now, let's consider what we know about the characters, the plot and point of view, and see if we can develop a theme about "His Motto."</b></p> <p>[Show Slide 24.] <b>Question 1: What were Durmont and Hilton's points of view about Hilton's ability to help Durmont earlier in the story? Jot your answer on your paper. You can use your point of view note-catcher to help you.</b> [Pause.] <b>Good work! Did your answer look something like this?</b> [Show Slide 25.]</p> <p><b>Durmont was doubtful Robert would be able to help. He expressed and demonstrated prejudice toward him, but Robert was confident that his wireless would work.</b></p> <p>[Show Slide 26.] <b>Question 2: How did Durmont's point of view change by the end of the story? Jot your answer on your paper.</b> [Pause.] <b>Awesome job! Your response was spot on!</b> [Show Slide 27.]</p> <p><b>Durmont's point of view changes as he sees Robert working hard and remembers what it was like for himself when he was younger. He starts to see to see Robert as a human being, not just another young, black boy.</b></p> <p>[Show Slide 28.] <b>Question 3: What events and descriptions show Durmont reconsidering his point of view? Consult your plot map to answer this question.</b> [Pause.] <b>Yes, there were a couple of events. First, he saw the motto from Abraham Lincoln hanging up, right? Here's that part again.</b> [Show Slide 29.]</p> <p><b>What is the meaning of the 'motto' that Durmont sees on Hilton's wall?</b> [Pause.] <b>You are right. It means that if you work hard and prepare, you will be rewarded when opportunity comes. How does this motto impact Durmont's thinking? Write your idea as part of your answer for question 3.</b> [Pause.] <b>Does your response look like this?</b> [Show Slide 30.]</p>	<p>Students respond to a series of questions designed to consolidate their understanding of the characters' evolving points of view and prepare them to translate that knowledge into an understanding of theme.</p>



<p>Durmont sees the motto from Lincoln and is reminded of himself when he was young and working hard to achieve his dreams. He realizes Robert has had it more difficult than he did because he is black and has limited resources.</p> <p>What else? [Pause.] Yes, later when he realizes that Robert's pride in his success and willingness to help is more important than money, Durmont is stunned and starts to think. Here's that section of the story. [Show Slide 31.] How does this affect Durmont's point of view? [Pause.] Exactly! He understands how prejudicial he has been and decides to offer Robert a chance at his company. [Show Slide 32.]</p>	
<p><b>Independent Work</b> (1 mi)</p> <p>We are just about out of time for today. Thank you so much for reading and analyzing characters and point of view in the short story "His Motto" with me. I have one more thing I'd like to ask you to do today. Now that you have all these great notes you took, please take some time after this video to answer this question for independent practice: [Show Slide 33.]</p> <p>What is a theme of the story of "His Motto?" How do the characters' actions and points of view develop this theme?</p> <p>Students, please copy down the independent practice so you have the assignment when the video ends. Remember that a theme is a message the author is trying to convey to the reader. So basically, your writing will explain how the author of this story uses characters' actions and points of view to send a message to the reader. You have lots of evidence in your notes that you can use in your explanation.</p>	<p>Students write a paragraph about the theme of the short story "His Motto" and explain how the characters' actions and points of view contribute to the theme.</p>
<p><b>Closing</b> (1 minute)</p> <p>I enjoyed working on "His Motto" with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. Bye!</p>	