

Before You Read

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

by Katherine Anne Porter

LITERARY FOCUS: STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Stream of consciousness is a style of writing that portrays the sometimes chaotic workings of a character's mind. This technique presents thoughts, memories, emotions, associations, and images as they flow randomly through a character's mind. Stream-of-consciousness passages often contain **ambiguities**, or meanings that are open to more than one interpretation.

As you read this story, notice how Granny Weatherall's thoughts of the present mingle with her memories of the past. Also, be sure to look out for ambiguities.

Record Your Thoughts Record some of your own thoughts in a stream-of-consciousness style. First, find a photograph in this book or in a magazine. Look at the image, and record your thoughts, associations, memories, and feelings in the chart below. A sample has been provided for you.

Image	Thoughts About Photograph
burning building	fire in my neighborhood—flames shooting in the sky—how a burn hurts—firefighters covered with soot—flames of hell

READING SKILLS: READING CLOSELY

Stories written in a stream-of-consciousness style require you to **read closely**. Here are some suggestions to make your reading easier:

- Notice **details** about people and events. Ask questions as you read.
- Pay attention to **verb tenses** to help you distinguish past from present.
- Look for **quotation marks**, which enclose words that are spoken aloud. Unspoken words and thoughts have no quotation marks.
- Find **context clues** that tell you which character is speaking.
- Re-read if you are puzzled about something.

REVIEW SKILLS

As you read "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," be aware of the following literary devices.

AMBIGUITY

The state of having two or more possible meanings.

IRONY

A contrast between expectation and reality. What happens is different from what was expected to happen.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand stream-of-consciousness and ambiguity.

Reading Skills

Read closely for clues to meaning.

Review Skills

Understand irony (verbal irony, situational irony, and dramatic irony) and ambiguity.

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

Katherine Anne Porter

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In lines 2–5, underline Granny Weatherall's unspoken thoughts, which have no quotation marks. Circle what she says aloud, which is in quotation marks.

INFER

Underline what Granny Weatherall says to the doctor in lines 10–12. What can you infer about her character from this dialogue?

INTERPRET

Why does it seem to Granny Weatherall that her bones and the doctor are floating (lines 19–22)?

She flicked her wrist neatly out of Doctor Harry's pudgy careful fingers and pulled the sheet up to her chin. The brat ought to be in knee breeches. Doctoring around the country with spectacles on his nose! "Get along now, take your schoolbooks and go. There's nothing wrong with me."

Doctor Harry spread a warm paw like a cushion on her forehead where the forked green vein danced and made her eyelids twitch. "Now, now, be a good girl, and we'll have you up in no time."

10 "That's no way to speak to a woman nearly eighty years old just because she's down. I'd have you respect your elders, young man."

"Well, Missy, excuse me." Doctor Harry patted her cheek. "But I've got to warn you, haven't I? You're a marvel, but you must be careful or you're going to be good and sorry."

"Don't tell me what I'm going to be. I'm on my feet now, morally speaking. It's Cornelia. I had to go to bed to get rid of her."

20 Her bones felt loose, and floated around in her skin, and Doctor Harry floated like a balloon around the foot of the bed. He floated and pulled down his waistcoat and swung his glasses on a cord. "Well, stay where you are, it certainly can't hurt you."

"Get along and doctor your sick," said Granny Weatherall. "Leave a well woman alone. I'll call for you when I want you. . . . Where were you forty years ago when I pulled through milk leg¹ and double pneumonia? You weren't even born. Don't let

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1. **milk leg:** painful swelling of the leg, usually as a result of an infection during childbirth.

READING CLOSELY

Who is speaking in lines 37–38?

VOCABULARY

tactful (takt'fəl) *adj.*: skilled in saying the right thing.

IRONY

Circle the adjectives Granny Weatherall uses to describe Cornelia in lines 39–44. What is **ironic** about this passage? (*Review Skill*)

AMBIGUITY

Lines 51–55 can be understood in two ways. What is ambiguous about Granny Weatherall's thoughts of her children and her day? (*Review Skill*)

Cornelia lead you on," she shouted, because Doctor Harry appeared to float up to the ceiling and out. "I pay my own bills, and I don't throw my money away on nonsense!"

30 She meant to wave goodbye, but it was too much trouble. Her eyes closed of themselves, it was like a dark curtain drawn around the bed. The pillow rose and floated under her, pleasant as a hammock in a light wind. She listened to the leaves rustling outside the window. No, somebody was swishing newspapers: No, Cornelia and Doctor Harry were whispering together. She leaped broad awake, thinking they whispered in her ear.

"She was never like this, never like this!" "Well, what can we expect?" "Yes, eighty years old. . . ."

Well, and what if she was? She still had ears. It was like
40 Cornelia to whisper around doors. She always kept things secret in such a public way. She was always being **tactful** and kind. Cornelia was dutiful; that was the trouble with her. Dutiful and good: "So good and dutiful," said Granny, "that I'd like to spank her." She saw herself spanking Cornelia and making a fine job of it.

"What'd you say, Mother?"

Granny felt her face tying up in hard knots.

"Can't a body think, I'd like to know?"

"I thought you might want something."

"I do. I want a lot of things. First off, go away and don't
50 whisper."

She lay and drowsed, hoping in her sleep that the children would keep out and let her rest a minute. It had been a long day. Not that she was tired. It was always pleasant to snatch a minute now and then. There was always so much to be done, let me see: tomorrow.

Tomorrow was far away and there was nothing to trouble about. Things were finished somehow when the time came; thank God there was always a little margin over for peace: Then a person could spread out the plan of life and tuck in the edges
60 orderly. It was good to have everything clean and folded away, with the hairbrushes and tonic bottles sitting straight on the

white embroidered linen: the day started without fuss and the pantry shelves laid out with rows of jelly glasses and brown jugs and white stone-china jars with blue whirligigs and words painted on them: coffee, tea, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, allspice: and the bronze clock with the lion on top nicely dusted off. The dust that lion could collect in twenty-four hours! The box in the attic with all those letters tied up, well, she'd have to go through that tomorrow. All those letters—George's letters and John's letters and her letters to them both—lying around for the children to find afterward made her uneasy. Yes, that would be tomorrow's business. No use to let them know how silly she had been once.

While she was rummaging around she found death in her mind and it felt **clammy** and unfamiliar. She had spent so much time preparing for death there was no need for bringing it up again. Let it take care of itself now. When she was sixty she had felt very old, finished, and went around making farewell trips to see her children and grandchildren, with a secret in her mind: This is the very last of your mother, children! Then she made her will and came down with a long fever. That was all just a notion like a lot of other things, but it was lucky too, for she had once for all got over the idea of dying for a long time. Now she couldn't be worried. She hoped she had better sense now. Her father had lived to be one hundred and two years old and had drunk a noggin² of strong hot toddy³ on his last birthday. He told the reporters it was his daily habit, and he owed his long life to that. He had made quite a scandal and was very pleased about it. She believed she'd just **plague** Cornelia a little.

"Cornelia! Cornelia!" No footsteps, but a sudden hand on her cheek. "Bless you, where have you been?"

"Here, Mother."

"Well, Cornelia, I want a noggin of hot toddy."

"Are you cold, darling?"

2. **noggin** *n.*: mug.

3. **hot toddy** *n.*: drink made of liquor mixed with hot water, sugar, and spices.

READING CLOSELY

Underline the details in lines 60–66 that help you picture Granny Weatherall's orderly life.

READING CLOSELY

Pause at line 73. Who do you think the letter writers George and John are?

IDENTIFY

In lines 74–83, underline what Granny Weatherall did at age sixty.

VOCABULARY

clammy (klam'ē) *adj.*: cold and damp.

plague (plāg) *v.*: annoy.

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. Focus on conveying meaning the first time. During your second reading, try to bring Granny Weatherall's thoughts to life.

INFER

Based on lines 97–107, what do you think Granny Weatherall's relationship with her children is like?

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In lines 108–137, Granny Weatherall's mind wanders between the past and the present. What do you learn about her life in this long paragraph?

"I'm chilly, Cornelia. Lying in bed stops the circulation. I must have told you that a thousand times."

Well, she could just hear Cornelia telling her husband that Mother was getting a little childish and they'd have to humor her. The thing that most annoyed her was that Cornelia thought
100 she was deaf, dumb, and blind. Little hasty glances and tiny gestures tossed around her and over her head saying, "Don't cross her, let her have her way, she's eighty years old," and she sitting there as if she lived in a thin glass cage. Sometimes Granny almost made up her mind to pack up and move back to her own house where nobody could remind her every minute that she was old. Wait, wait, Cornelia, till your own children whisper behind your back!

In her day she had kept a better house and had got more work done. She wasn't too old yet for Lydia to be driving eighty
110 miles for advice when one of the children jumped the track, and Jimmy still dropped in and talked things over: "Now, Mammy, you've a good business head, I want to know what you think of this? . . ." Old. Cornelia couldn't change the furniture around without asking. Little things, little things! They had been so sweet when they were little. Granny wished the old days were back again with the children young and everything to be done over. It had been a hard pull, but not too much for her. When she thought of all the food she had cooked, and all the clothes she had cut and sewed, and all the gardens she had made—well,
120 the children showed it. There they were, made out of her, and they couldn't get away from that. Sometimes she wanted to see John again and point to them and say, Well, I didn't do so badly, did I? But that would have to wait. That was for tomorrow. She used to think of him as a man, but now all the children were older than their father, and he would be a child beside her if she saw him now. It seemed strange and there was something wrong in the idea. Why, he couldn't possibly recognize her. She had fenced in a hundred acres once, digging the postholes herself and clamping the wires with just a Negro boy to help. That

130 changed a woman. John would be looking for a young woman with the peaked Spanish comb in her hair and the painted fan. Digging postholes changed a woman. Riding country roads in the winter when women had their babies was another thing: sitting up nights with sick horses and sick Negroes and sick children and hardly ever losing one. John, I hardly ever lost one of them! John would see that in a minute, that would be something he could understand, she wouldn't have to explain anything!

It made her feel like rolling up her sleeves and putting the whole place to rights again. No matter if Cornelia was determined to be everywhere at once, there were a great many things left undone on this place. She would start tomorrow and do them. It was good to be strong enough for everything, even if all you made melted and changed and slipped under your hands, so that by the time you finished you almost forgot what you were working for. What was it I set out to do? she asked herself intently, but she could not remember. A fog rose over the valley, she saw it marching across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts. Soon it would be at the near edge of the orchard, and then it was time to go in and light the lamps.

150 Come in, children, don't stay out in the night air.

Lighting the lamps had been beautiful. The children huddled up to her and breathed like little calves waiting at the bars in the twilight. Their eyes followed the match and watched the flame rise and settle in a blue curve, then they moved away from her. The lamp was lit, they didn't have to be scared and hang on to mother any more. Never, never, never more. God, for all my life I thank Thee. Without Thee, my God, I could never have done it. Hail, Mary, full of grace.

I want you to pick all the fruit this year and see that nothing is wasted. There's always someone who can use it. Don't let good things rot for want of using. You waste life when you waste good food. Don't let things get lost. It's bitter to lose things. Now, don't let me get to thinking, not when I am tired and taking a little nap before supper. . . .

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IRONY

Dramatic irony occurs when the reader knows something a character doesn't. What is the dramatic irony in lines 138–142? (*Review Skill*)

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

What is the progression of Granny Weatherall's thoughts in lines 146–150?

AMBIGUITY

Re-read lines 159–162. Underline the phrase that shows how strongly Granny Weatherall feels about losing things. What might she be thinking about losing besides food? (*Review Skill*)

READING CLOSELY

What past event do you learn about in lines 168–171?

IRONY

What is the **irony** in lines 177–182? (*Review Skill*)

VOCABULARY

vanity (van'ə·tē) *n.*: excessive pride.

jilted (jilt'id) *v.*: rejected (as a lover).

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 182–185. Who is Ellen? Who is giving her advice?

The pillow rose about her shoulders and pressed against her heart and the memory was being squeezed out of it: Oh, push down the pillow, somebody: It would smother her if she tried to hold it. Such a fresh breeze blowing and such a green day with no threats in it. But he had not come, just the same. What does a woman do when she has put on the white veil and set out the white cake for a man and he doesn't come? She tried to remember. No, I swear he never harmed me but in that. He never harmed me but in that . . . and what if he did? There was the day, the day, but a whirl of dark smoke rose and covered it, crept up and over into the bright field where everything was planted so carefully in orderly rows. That was hell, she knew hell when she saw it. For sixty years she had prayed against remembering him and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell, and now the two things were mingled in one and the thought of him was a smoky cloud from hell that moved and crept in her head when she had just got rid of Doctor Harry and was trying to rest a minute. Wounded **vanity**, Ellen, said a sharp voice in the top of her mind. Don't let your wounded vanity get the upper hand of you. Plenty of girls get **jilted**. You were jilted, weren't you? Then stand up to it. Her eyelids wavered and let in streamers of blue-gray light like tissue paper over her eyes. She must get up and pull the shades down or she'd never sleep. She was in bed again and the shades were not down. How could that happen? Better turn over, hide from the light, sleeping in the light gave you nightmares. "Mother, how do you feel now?" and a stinging wetness on her forehead. But I don't like having my face washed in cold water!

Hapsy? George? Lydia? Jimmy? No, Cornelia, and her features were swollen and full of little puddles. "They're coming, darling, they'll all be here soon." Go wash your face, child, you look funny.

Instead of obeying, Cornelia knelt down and put her head on the pillow. She seemed to be talking but there was no sound.

“Well, are you tongue-tied? Whose birthday is it? Are you going to give a party?”

Cornelia’s mouth moved urgently in strange shapes. “Don’t do that, you bother me, daughter.”

“Oh, no, Mother. Oh, no . . .”

Nonsense. It was strange about children. They **disputed** your every word. “No what, Cornelia?”

“Here’s Doctor Harry.”

“I won’t see that boy again. He just left five minutes ago.”

“That was this morning, Mother. It’s night now. Here’s the nurse.”

“This is Doctor Harry, Mrs. Weatherall. I never saw you look so young and happy!”

“Ah, I’ll never be young again—but I’d be happy if they’d let me lie in peace and get rested.”

She thought she spoke up loudly, but no one answered. A warm weight on her forehead, a warm bracelet on her wrist, and a breeze went on whispering, trying to tell her something. A shuffle of leaves in the everlasting hand of God, He blew on them and they danced and rattled. “Mother, don’t mind, we’re going to give you a little hypodermic.”⁴ “Look here, daughter, how do ants get in this bed? I saw sugar ants yesterday.” Did you send for Hapsy too?

It was Hapsy she really wanted. She had to go a long way back through a great many rooms to find Hapsy standing with a baby on her arm. She seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy’s arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting. Then Hapsy melted from within and turned flimsy as gray gauze and the baby was a gauzy shadow, and Hapsy came up close and said, “I thought you’d never come,” and looked at her very searchingly and said, “You haven’t changed a bit!” They leaned forward to kiss, when Cornelia began whispering from a long way off,

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 194–213 carefully. Circle the words Cornelia says. Underline what Granny Weatherall says aloud. Put two lines under the words Granny thinks she says aloud but doesn’t.

VOCABULARY

disputed (di·spyōt’id) v.: contested.

READING CLOSELY

Underline the **images** in lines 214–216. What do these images describe?

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Granny Weatherall thinks about her daughter Hapsy in lines 222–231. Underline how Granny finds Hapsy. Circle Hapsy’s words. What do you learn here about Hapsy?

4. **hypodermic** *n.*: injection of medicine.

Notes

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 233–239. Who is George?

READING CLOSELY

What do you think was not given back to Granny Weatherall (lines 240–243)?



Evening Light (1908) by Frank Benson. Oil on canvas (25¼" × 30½"). Cincinnati Art Museum, Kate Banning Fund.

"Oh, is there anything you want to tell me? Is there anything I can do for you?"

Yes, she had changed her mind after sixty years and she would like to see George. I want you to find George. Find him and be sure to tell him I forgot him. I want him to know I had my husband just the same and my children and my house like any other woman. A good house too and a good husband that I loved and fine children out of him. Better than I hoped for even.
240 Tell him I was given back everything he took away and more. Oh, no, oh, God, no, there was something else besides the house and the man and the children. Oh, surely they were not all?



What was it? Something not given back. . . .
Her breath crowded down under her ribs and
grew into a monstrous frightening shape with
cutting edges; it bored up into her head, and
the agony was unbelievable: Yes, John, get the
Doctor now, no more talk, my time has come.

When this one was born it should be the
250 last. The last. It should have been born first,
for it was the one she had truly wanted.
Everything came in good time. Nothing left
out, left over. She was strong, in three days she
would be as well as ever. Better. A woman
needed milk in her to have her full health.

“Mother, do you hear me?”

“I’ve been telling you—”

“Mother, Father Connolly’s here.”

“I went to Holy Communion only last
260 week. Tell him I’m not so sinful as all that.”

“Father just wants to speak to you.”

He could speak as much as he pleased. It
was like him to drop in and inquire about her

soul as if it were a teething baby, and then stay on for a cup of
tea and a round of cards and gossip. He always had a funny
story of some sort, usually about an Irishman who made his lit-
tle mistakes and confessed them, and the point lay in some
absurd thing he would blurt out in the confessional showing his
struggles between native piety and original sin.⁵ Granny felt easy
270 about her soul. Cornelia, where are your manners? Give Father
Connolly a chair. She had her secret comfortable understanding
with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for
her. All as surely signed and sealed as the papers for the new

5. **original sin:** in Christian theology, the sin of disobedience committed
by Adam and Eve, the first man and first woman, which is passed on
to all persons.

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 244–255.
Underline what Granny
Weatherall thinks about say-
ing. What does her deathbed
pain remind her of?

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Re-read lines 258–274. Father
Connolly’s visit reminds
Granny Weatherall of visits
by the priest in the past.
Underline what happened
during a different visit (lines
262–265). This memory leads
her to think about God.
Circle how Granny feels
about religion (lines
269–274).

IDENTIFY

In lines 274–275, Granny remembers another day the priest was there. What happened that day?

AMBIGUITY

Re-read lines 275–283. Who do you think catches Granny Weatherall when she almost faints? Who threatens to kill George? (*Review Skill*)

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Granny Weatherall's thoughts wander through time in lines 284–290. What periods of her life is she imagining?

VOCABULARY

nimbus (nim'bəs) *n.*: aura; halo.

Forty Acres. Forever . . . heirs and assigns forever. Since the day the wedding cake was not cut, but thrown out and wasted. The whole bottom dropped out of the world, and there she was blind and sweating with nothing under her feet and the walls falling away. His hand had caught her under the breast, she had not fallen, there was the freshly polished floor with the green rug on it, just as before. He had cursed like a sailor's parrot and said, "I'll kill him for you." Don't lay a hand on him, for my sake leave something to God. "Now, Ellen, you must believe what I tell you. . . ."

So there was nothing, nothing to worry about any more, except sometimes in the night one of the children screamed in a nightmare, and they both hustled out shaking and hunting for the matches and calling, "There, wait a minute, here we are!" John, get the doctor now, Hapsy's time has come. But there was Hapsy standing by the bed in a white cap. "Cornelia, tell Hapsy to take off her cap. I can't see her plain."

Her eyes opened very wide and the room stood out like a picture she had seen somewhere. Dark colors with the shadows rising toward the ceiling in long angles. The tall black dresser gleamed with nothing on it but John's picture, enlarged from a little one, with John's eyes very black when they should have been blue. You never saw him, so how do you know how he looked? But the man insisted the copy was perfect, it was very rich and handsome. For a picture, yes, but it's not my husband. The table by the bed had a linen cover and a candle and a crucifix. The light was blue from Cornelia's silk lampshades. No sort of light at all, just frippery. You had to live forty years with kerosene lamps to appreciate honest electricity. She felt very strong and she saw Doctor Harry with a rosy **nimbus** around him.

"You look like a saint, Doctor Harry, and I vow that's as near as you'll ever come to it."

“She’s saying something.”

“I heard you, Cornelia. What’s all this carrying-on?”

“Father Connolly’s saying—”

310 Cornelia’s voice staggered and bumped like a cart in a bad road. It rounded corners and turned back again and arrived nowhere. Granny stepped up in the cart very lightly and reached for the reins, but a man sat beside her and she knew him by his hands, driving the cart. She did not look in his face, for she knew without seeing, but looked instead down the road where the trees leaned over and bowed to each other and a thousand birds were singing a Mass. She felt like singing too, but she put her hand in the bosom of her dress and pulled out a rosary, and Father Connolly murmured Latin in a very solemn voice and

320 tickled her feet.⁶ My God, will you stop that nonsense? I’m a married woman. What if he did run away and leave me to face the priest by myself? I found another a whole world better. I wouldn’t have exchanged my husband for anybody except St. Michael⁷ himself, and you may tell him that for me with a thank you in the bargain.

Light flashed on her closed eyelids, and a deep roaring shook her. Cornelia, is that lightning? I hear thunder. There’s going to be a storm. Close all the windows. Call the children in. . . .

330 “Mother, here we are, all of us.” “Is that you, Hapsy?” “Oh, no, I’m Lydia. We drove as fast as we could.” Their faces drifted above her, drifted away. The rosary fell out of her hands and Lydia put it back. Jimmy tried to help, their hands fumbled together, and Granny closed two fingers around Jimmy’s thumb. Beads wouldn’t do, it must be something alive. She was so amazed her thoughts ran round and round. So, my dear Lord,

6. **murmured . . . feet:** The priest is performing the sacramental last rites of the Roman Catholic Church, which include anointing the dying person’s feet with oil.

7. **Michael:** most powerful of the four archangels in Jewish and Christian doctrine. In Christian art he is usually depicted as a handsome knight in white armor.

AMBIGUITY

Re-read lines 310–317.

Granny Weatherall doesn’t say who is in the cart beside her. Who do you think he is? (*Review Skill*)

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 320–325.

Granny Weatherall says she greatly loves her husband, John, so why does she keep thinking about George?

READING CLOSELY

In lines 326–330, Granny Weatherall’s mind moves from the present to the past. Circle details that take place in the present. Underline details that Granny imagines from the past.

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 335–346.
Granny Weatherall realizes that she is dying. Why doesn't she want to die yet?

IDENTIFY

In line 350, underline what reconciles Granny Weatherall to dying.

VOCABULARY

dwindled (dwin'dəld) *v.*: diminished.

AMBIGUITY

Lines 361–365 can be interpreted several ways. Once again Granny Weatherall has been left alone without a sign from God. What sorrow do you think has wiped away all others? (*Review Skill*)

this is my death and I wasn't even thinking about it. My children have come to see me die. But I can't, it's not time. Oh, I always hated surprises. I wanted to give Cornelia the amethyst⁸ set—Cornelia, you're to have the amethyst set, but Hapsy's to wear it when she wants, and, Doctor Harry, do shut up. Nobody sent for you. Oh, my dear Lord, do wait a minute. I meant to do something about the Forty Acres, Jimmy doesn't need it and Lydia will later on, with that worthless husband of hers. I meant to finish the altar cloth and send six bottles of wine to Sister Borgia for her dyspepsia.⁹ I want to send six bottles of wine to Sister Borgia, Father Connolly, now don't let me forget.

Cornelia's voice made short turns and tilted over and crashed. "Oh, Mother, oh, Mother, oh, Mother . . ."

"I'm not going, Cornelia. I'm taken by surprise. I can't go."

You'll see Hapsy again. What about her? "I thought you'd never come." Granny made a long journey outward, looking for Hapsy. What if I don't find her? What then? Her heart sank down and down, there was no bottom to death, she couldn't come to the end of it. The blue light from Cornelia's lampshade drew into a tiny point in the center of her brain, it flickered and winked like an eye, quietly it fluttered and **dwindled**. Granny lay curled down within herself, amazed and watchful, staring at the point of light that was herself; her body was now only a deeper mass of shadow in an endless darkness and this darkness would curl around the light and swallow it up. God, give a sign!

For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh, no, there's nothing more cruel than this—I'll never forgive it. She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light.

8. **amethyst** (am'i·thist) *n.*: purple or violet quartz gemstone, used in jewelry.

9. **dyspepsia** (dis·pep'sē·ə) *n.*: indigestion.

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

Reading Skills: Reading Closely The chart below lists some of the people in Granny Weatherall's life. In the right-hand column, fill in what you learned about each of the characters as Granny spoke or thought about them in this stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Character	What I Learned About the Character
George	
John	
Cornelia	
Hapsy	
Father Connolly	

Vocabulary Development

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

DIRECTIONS: Write vocabulary words from the word box to complete the paragraph below. Not all words from the box will be used.

Word Box

tactful
clammy
plague
vanity
jilted
disputed
nimbus
dwindled

That Katherine Anne Porter's fame is well deserved cannot be (1) _____. Who would contest that her use of language to create character and mood is the sign of a great literary talent? In this famous short story, she is able to draw readers into the personal, inner world of a dying grandmother who was (2) _____ by her lover on her wedding day sixty years before. This rejection in Granny Weatherall's early life would (3) _____ her until she died. Porter creates a vibrant portrait of a strong-willed woman, who is blunt rather than (4) _____ in her dealings with her family.

ANALOGIES: USING SYNONYMS AND ANTONYMS

In a **word analogy**, two pairs of words have the same relationship. Often the words in each pair are **synonyms**—words with similar meanings—or **antonyms**—words with opposite meanings. In the analogy below, the words in each pair are synonyms.

ANGRY : FURIOUS :: humorous : funny

DIRECTIONS: Study each word analogy below to determine if the words in the complete pair are antonyms or synonyms. Then, fill in each blank with the appropriate word from the word box above. In the blank following each analogy, write "A" if the word pairs are antonyms or "S" if they are synonyms.

1. DESTROYED : CREATED :: _____ : increased _____
2. _____ : HALO :: ocean : sea _____
3. ARID : DRY :: _____ : damp _____
4. _____ : MODESTY :: sanity : madness _____

SKILLS
FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills

Use vocabulary in context. Complete word analogies.

Vocabulary Development

A Rose for Emily

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

DIRECTIONS: Write words from the Word Box to complete the paragraph below. Not all words from the box will be used.

Word Box

remitted
archaic
vindicated
pauper
circumvent
virulent
tranquil
perverse
acid
inextricable

William Faulkner never broke his binding, (1) **inextricable** ties to the South. His decision to remain in Mississippi most of his life was (2) **vindicated** by his brilliant literary career. However, while romantic Southern writers describe the sweet scent of magnolias, Faulkner reveals the (3) **acid** odor of the society he knew so well. Many of the characters in his works have a contrary, (4) **perverse** love-hate relationship with their communities. While some of Faulkner's characters, such as Miss Emily, have a calm, almost (5) **tranquil** appearance, they are burdened by angry, (6) **virulent** emotions below the surface.

DENOTATIONS AND CONNOTATIONS

A word's **denotation** is its literal, dictionary definition. Its **connotations** are the additional meanings, associations, and emotions suggested by the word. For example, the words *save* and *hoard* both mean "keep." However, *save* has positive connotations, while *hoard* has negative connotations of greed and secrecy.

DIRECTIONS: For each word from "A Rose for Emily" listed below that has a positive connotation, fill in a word with a similar meaning that has a negative connotation, and vice versa. The first one has been filled in for you.

SKILLS FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills
Use vocabulary words in context. Understand the denotations and connotations.

Positive Connotation	Negative Connotation	Positive Connotation	Negative Connotation
curiosity	nosiness	earthiness	filthiness
moist	dark	proud	haughty
puffy	bloated	looked	stared
slender	skinny	persuade	force

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Before You Read

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

by Katherine Anne Porter

LITERARY FOCUS: STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Stream of consciousness is a style of writing that portrays the sometimes chaotic workings of a character's mind. This technique presents thoughts, memories, emotions, associations, and images as they flow randomly through a character's mind. Stream-of-consciousness passages often contain **ambiguities**, or meanings that are open to more than one interpretation. As you read this story, notice how Granny Weatherall's thoughts of the present mingle with her memories of the past. Also, be sure to look out for ambiguities.

Record Your Thoughts

Record some of your own thoughts in a stream-of-consciousness style. First, find a photograph in this book or in a magazine. Look at the image, and record your thoughts, associations, memories, and feelings in the chart below. A sample has been provided for you.

Image	Thoughts About Photograph
burning building	fire in my neighborhood—flames shooting in the sky—how a burn hurts—firefighters covered with soot—flames of hell

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Understand stream of consciousness and ambiguity.

Reading Skills
Read closely for details and meaning.

Review Skills
Understand irony (verbal, situational, dramatic) and ambiguity.

READING SKILLS: READING CLOSELY

Stories written in a stream-of-consciousness style require you to **read closely**. Here are some suggestions to make your reading easier:

- Notice **details** about people and events. Ask questions as you read.
- Pay attention to **verb tenses** to help you distinguish past from present.
- Look for **quotation marks**, which enclose words that are spoken aloud. Unspoken words and thoughts have no quotation marks.
- Find **context clues** that tell you which character is speaking.
- Re-read if you are puzzled about something.

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

Katherine Anne Porter

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In lines 2–5, underline Granny Weatherall's unspoken thoughts, which have no quotation marks. Circle what she says aloud, which is in quotation marks.

INFER

Underline what Granny Weatherall says to the doctor in lines 10–12. What can you infer about her character from this dialogue?

She is a strong-willed, feisty woman who knows what she wants.

INTERPRET

Why does it seem to Granny Weatherall that her bones and the doctor are floating (lines 19–22)?

They float because she is ill and perceives the world strangely.

"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" from *Flowering of the Bones* by Katherine Anne Porter. Copyright 1930 and renewed © 1958 by Katherine Anne Porter. Electronic format by permission of Barbara Thompson Davis, Literary Heirs.

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She flicked her wrist neatly out of Doctor Harry's pudgy careful fingers and pulled the sheet up to her chin. The brat ought to be in knee breeches. Doctoring around the country with spectacles on his nose! "Get along now, take your schoolbooks and go. There's nothing wrong with me."

Doctor Harry spread a warm paw like a cushion on her forehead where the forked green vein danced and made her eyelids twitch. "Now, now, be a good girl, and we'll have you up in no time."

"That's no way to speak to a woman nearly eighty years old just because she's down. I'd have you respect your elders, young man."

"Well, Missy, excuse me." Doctor Harry patted her cheek. "But I've got to warn you, haven't I? You're a marvel, but you must be careful or you're going to be good and sorry."

"Don't tell me what I'm going to be. I'm on my feet now, morally speaking. It's Cornelia. I had to go to bed to get rid of her."

Her bones felt loose, and floated around in her skin, and Doctor Harry floated like a balloon around the foot of the bed. He floated and pulled down his waistcoat and swung his glasses on a cord. "Well, stay where you are, it certainly can't hurt you."

"Get along and doctor your sick," said Granny Weatherall. "Leave a well woman alone. I'll call for you when I want you. . . . Where were you forty years ago when I pulled through milk leg¹ and double pneumonia? You weren't even born. Don't let

1. milk leg: painful swelling of the leg, usually as a result of an infection during childbirth.

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Notes



New England Woman (1895) by Cecilia Beaux. Oil on canvas (43" × 24¼"). The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Joseph E. Temple Fund.

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Comelia lead you on," she shouted, because Doctor Harry appeared to float up to the ceiling and out. "I pay my own bills, and I don't throw my money away on nonsense!"

She meant to wave goodbye, but it was too much trouble. Her eyes closed of themselves, it was like a dark curtain drawn around the bed. The pillow rose and floated under her, pleasant as a hammock in a light wind. She listened to the leaves rustling outside the window. No, somebody was swishing newspapers: No, Comelia and Doctor Harry were whispering together. She leaped broad awake, thinking they whispered in her ear.

"She was never like this, never like this!" "Well, what can we expect?" "Yes, eighty years old. . . ."

Well, and what if she was? She still had ears. It was like Comelia to whisper around doors. She always kept things secret in such a public way. She was always being **tactful** and **kind**.

Comelia was **tactful** that was the trouble with her. Dutiful and **good**. "So good and dutiful," said Granny, "that I'd like to spank her." She saw herself spanking Comelia and making a fine job of it.

"What'd you say, Mother?"

Granny felt her face tying up in hard knots.

"Can't a body think, I'd like to know?"

"I thought you might want something."

"I do. I want a lot of things. First off, go away and don't whisper."

She lay and drowsed, hoping in her sleep that the children would keep out and let her rest a minute. It had been a long day. Not that she was tired. It was always pleasant to snatch a minute now and then. There was always so much to be done, let me see: tomorrow.

Tomorrow was far away and there was nothing to trouble about. Things were finished somehow when the time came; thank God there was always a little margin over for peace. Then a person could spread out the plan of life and tuck in the edges orderly. It was good to have everything clean and folded away, with the hairbrushes and tonic bottles sitting straight on the

READING CLOSELY

Who is speaking in lines 37–38?

First Comelia is speaking, then Dr. Harry.

VOCABULARY

tactful (tak'tfŭl) adj.: skilled in saying the right thing.

IRONY

Circle the adjectives Granny Weatherall uses to describe Comelia in lines 39–44. What is ironic about this passage? (*Review Skill*)

Granny wants to spank Comelia for being good.

AMBIGUITY

Lines 51–55 can be understood in two ways. What is ambiguous about Granny Weatherall's thoughts of her children and her day? (*Review Skill*)

She could be thinking about her adult children, who are somewhere in the house, or she could be thinking about the past, when her children were young.

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white embroidered linen: the day started without fuss and the pantry shelves laid out with rows of jelly glasses and brown jugs and white stone-china jars with blue whirligigs and words painted on them: coffee, tea, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, allspice: and the bronze clock with the lion on top nicely dusted off. The dust that lion could collect in twenty-four hours! The box in the attic with all those letters tied up, well, she'd have to go through that tomorrow. All those letters—George's letters and John's letters and her letters to them both—lying around for the children to find afterward made her uneasy. Yes, that would be tomorrow's business. No use to let them know how silly she had been once.

READING CLOSELY

Pause at line 73. Who do you think the letter writers George and John are?

They could be past lovers or husbands.

IDENTIFY

In lines 74–83, underline what Granny Weatherall did at age sixty.

VOCABULARY

clanny (klam'e) adj.: cold and damp.

plague (plag) v.: annoy.

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. Focus on conveying meaning the first time. During your second reading, try to bring Granny Weatherall's thoughts to life.

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While she was rummaging around she found death in her mind and it felt **clanny** and unfamiliar. She had spent so much time preparing for death there was no need for bringing it up again. Let it take care of itself now. When she was sixty she had felt very old, finished, and went around making farewell trips to see her children and grandchildren, with a secret in her mind: This is the very last of your mother, children! Then she made her will and came down with a long fever. That was all just a notion like a lot of other things, but it was lucky too, for she had once for all got over the idea of dying for a long time. Now she couldn't be worried. She hoped she had better sense now. Her father had lived to be one hundred and two years old and had drunk a **noggin**² of strong hot toddy³ on his last birthday. He told the reporters it was his daily habit, and he owed his long life to that. He had made quite a scandal and was very pleased about it. She believed she'd just **plague** Comelia a little.

"Cornelia! Cornelia!" No footsteps, but a sudden hand on her check. "Bless you, where have you been?"

"Here, Mother."

"Well, Comelia, I want a noggin of hot toddy."

"Are you cold, darling?"

READING CLOSELY

Underline the details in lines 60–66 that help you picture Granny Weatherall's orderly life.

READING CLOSELY

Pause at line 73. Who do you think the letter writers George and John are?

They could be past lovers or husbands.

IDENTIFY

In lines 74–83, underline what Granny Weatherall did at age sixty.

VOCABULARY

clanny (klam'e) adj.: cold and damp.

plague (plag) v.: annoy.

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. Focus on conveying meaning the first time. During your second reading, try to bring Granny Weatherall's thoughts to life.

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2. **noggin** n.: mug.
3. **hot toddy** n.: drink made of liquor mixed with hot water, sugar, and spices.

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INFER

Based on lines 97–107, what do you think Granny Weatherall's relationship with her children is like?

Her children walk on eggshells around her, and she resents it.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In lines 108–137, Granny Weatherall's mind wanders between the past and the present. What do you learn about her life in this long paragraph?

Her husband died young, and she worked hard to raise and support her children alone.

"I'm chilly, Cornelia. Lying in bed stops the circulation. I must have told you that a thousand times."

Well, she could just hear Cornelia telling her husband that Mother was getting a little childish and they'd have to humor her. The thing that most annoyed her was that Cornelia thought she was deaf, dumb, and blind. Little hasty glances and tiny gestures tossed around her and over her head saying, "Don't cross her, let her have her way, she's eighty years old," and she sitting there as if she lived in a thin glass cage. Sometimes Granny almost made up her mind to pack up and move back to her own house where nobody could remind her every minute that she was old. Wait, wait, Cornelia, till your own children whisper behind your back!

In her day she had kept a better house and had got more work done. She wasn't too old yet for Lydia to be driving eighty miles for advice when one of the children jumped the track, and Jimmy still dropped in and talked things over: "Now, Mammy, you've a good business head, I want to know what you think of this? . . ." Old Cornelia couldn't change the furniture around without asking. Little things, little things! They had been so sweet when they were little. Granny wished the old days were back again with the children young and everything to be done over. It had been a hard pull, but not too much for her. When she thought of all the food she had cooked, and all the clothes she had cut and sewed, and all the gardens she had made—well, the children showed it. There they were, made out of her, and they couldn't get away from that. Sometimes she wanted to see John again and point to them and say, Well, I didn't do so badly, did I? But that would have to wait. That was for tomorrow. She used to think of him as a man, but now all the children were older than their father, and he would be a child beside her if she saw him now. It seemed strange and there was something wrong in the idea. Why, he couldn't possibly recognize her. She had fenced in a hundred acres once, digging the postholes herself and clamping the wires with just a Negro boy to help. That

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IRONY

Dramatic irony occurs when the reader knows something a character doesn't. What is the dramatic irony in lines 138–142? (Review Skill)

Granny feels strong enough to clean the house, but the reader knows she is dying.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

What is the progression of Granny Weatherall's thoughts in lines 146–150? **She imagines a fog, which leads her to call in her young children.**

AMBIGUITY

Re-read lines 159–162. Underline the phrase that shows how strongly Granny Weatherall feels about losing things. What might she be thinking about losing besides food? (Review Skill)

She might be thinking about the loss of youth or love.

130 changed a woman. John would be looking for a young woman with the peaked Spanish comb in her hair and the painted fan. Digging postholes changed a woman. Riding country roads in the winter when women had their babies was another thing: sitting up nights with sick horses and sick Negroes and sick children and hardly ever losing one. John, I hardly ever lost one of them! John would see that in a minute, that would be something he could understand, she wouldn't have to explain anything!

It made her feel like rolling up her sleeves and putting the whole place to rights again. No matter if Cornelia was determined to be everywhere at once, there were a great many things left undone on this place. She would start tomorrow and do them. It was good to be strong enough for everything, even if all you made melted and changed and slipped under your hands, so that by the time you finished you almost forgot what you were working for. What was it I set out to do? she asked herself intently, but she could not remember. A fog rose over the valley, she saw it marching across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts. Soon it would be at the near edge of the orchard, and then it was time to go in and light the lamps. Come in, children, don't stay out in the night air.

Lighting the lamps had been beautiful. The children huddled up to her and breathed like little calves waiting at the bars in the twilight. Their eyes followed the match and watched the flame rise and settle in a blue curve, then they moved away from her. The lamp was lit, they didn't have to be scared and hang on to mother any more. Never, never, never more. God, for all my life I thank Thee. Without Thee, my God, I could never have done it. Ha! Mary, full of grace.

I want you to pick all the fruit this year and see that nothing is wasted. There's always someone who can use it. Don't let good things rot for want of using. You waste life when you waste good food. Don't let things get lost. It's bitter to lose things. Now, don't let me get to thinking, not when I am tired and taking a little nap before supper. . . .

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What past event do you learn about in lines 168–171?
Granny Weatherall

was stood up on her wedding day.

What is the **irony** in lines 177–182? (*Review Skill*)
You can't pray to forget something without remembering it while you do so.

vanity (van'ə-tē) *n.*: excessive pride.
jilted (jilt'əd) *v.*: rejected (as a lover).

Re-read lines 182–185. Who is Ellen? Who is giving her advice?
Ellen is Granny Weatherall. A voice in her own head is giving her advice.

The pillow rose about her shoulders and pressed against her heart and the memory was being squeezed out of it: Oh, push down the pillow, somebody: It would smother her if she tried to hold it. Such a fresh breeze blowing and such a green day with no threats in it. But he had not come, just the same. What does a woman do when she has put on the white veil and set out the white cake for a man and he doesn't come? She tried to remember. No, I swear he never harmed me but in that. He never harmed me but in that . . . and what if he did? There was the day, the day, but a whirl of dark smoke rose and covered it, crept up and over into the bright field where everything was planted so carefully in orderly rows. That was hell, she knew hell when she saw it. For sixty years she had prayed against remembering him and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell, and now the two things were mingled in one and the thought of him was a smoky cloud from hell that moved and crept in her head when she had just got rid of Doctor Harry and was trying to rest a minute. Wounded **vanity**, Ellen, said a sharp voice in the top of her mind. Don't let your wounded vanity get the upper hand of you. Plenty of girls get **jilted**. You were jilted, weren't you? Then stand up to it. Her eyelids wavered and let in streamers of blue-gray light like tissue paper over her eyes. She must get up and pull the shades down or she'd never sleep. She was in bed again and the shades were not down. How could that happen? Better turn over, hide from the light, sleeping in the light gave you nightmares. "Mother, how do you feel now?" and a stinging wetness on her forehead. But I don't like having my face washed in cold water!

Hapsy? George? Lydia? Jimmy? No, Cornelia, and her features were swollen and full of little puddles. "They're coming, darling, they'll all be here soon." Go wash your face, child, you look funny.

Instead of obeying, Cornelia knelt down and put her head on the pillow. She seemed to be talking but there was no sound.

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Re-read lines 194–213 carefully. Circle the words Cornelia says. Underline what Granny Weatherall says aloud. Put two lines under the words Granny thinks she says aloud but doesn't.

disputed (di-'spyt'əd) *v.*: contested.

Underline the images in lines 214–216. What do these images describe?

The images describe the doctor checking her forehead for fever and taking her pulse, and someone talking nearby.

Granny Weatherall thinks about her daughter Hapsy in lines 222–231. Underline how Granny finds Hapsy. Circle Hapsy's words. What do you learn here about Hapsy?
Hapsy had a son; she was Granny's favorite child; she died a long time ago.

"Well, are you tongue-tied? Whose birthday is it? Are you going to give a party?"

Cornelia's mouth moved urgently in strange shapes. "Don't do that, you bother me, daughter."

"Oh, no, Mother. Oh, no . . ."

Nonsense. It was strange about children. They **disputed** your every word. "No what, Cornelia?"

"Here's Doctor Harry!"

"I won't see that boy again. He just left five minutes ago."

"That was this morning. Mother. It's night now. Here's the nurse."

"This is Doctor Harry, Mrs. Weatherall. I never saw you look so young and happy!"

"Ah, I'll never be young again—but I'd be happy if they'd let me lie in peace and get rested!"

She thought she spoke up loudly, but no one answered. A warm weight on her forehead, a warm bracelet on her wrist, and a breeze went on whispering, trying to tell her something. A shuffle of leaves in the everlasting hand of God. He blew on them and they danced and rattled. "Mother, don't mind, we're going to give you a little hypodermic."⁴ "Look here, daughter, how do ants get in this bed? I saw sugar ants yesterday." Did you send for Hapsy too?

It was Hapsy she really wanted. She had to go a long way back through a great many rooms to find Hapsy standing with a baby on her arm. She seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting. Then Hapsy melted from within and turned flimsy as gray gauze and the baby was a gauzy shadow, and Hapsy came up close and said, "I thought you'd never come," and looked at her very searchingly and said, "You haven't changed a bit!" They leaned forward to kiss, when Cornelia began whispering from a long way off,

4. **hypodermic** *n.*: injection of medicine.

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Notes _____

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 233–239. Who is George?

George is the man who jilted Granny.

READING CLOSELY

What do you think was not given back to Granny Weatherall (lines 240–243)?

Possible response: She didn't get back her self-respect or her trust in the world.



Evening Light (1908) by Frank Benson. Oil on canvas (25¼" × 30⅞"). Cincinnati Art Museum, Kate Banning Fund.

“Oh, is there anything you want to tell me? Is there anything I can do for you?”

Yes, she had changed her mind after sixty years and she would like to see George. I want you to find George. Find him and be sure to tell him I forgot him. I want him to know I had my husband just the same and my children and my house like any other woman. A good house too and a good husband that I loved and fine children out of him. Better than I hoped for even. Tell him I was given back everything he took away and more. Oh, no, oh, God, no, there was something else besides the house and the man and the children. Oh, surely they were not all!

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READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 244–255. Underline what Granny Weatherall thinks about saying. What does her deathbed pain remind her of?

It reminds her of the pain of childbirth.

What was it? Something not given back. . . . Her breath crowded down under her ribs and grew into a monstrous frightening shape with cutting edges; it bored up into her head, and the agony was unbelievable: Yes, John, get the Doctor now, no more talk, my time has come.

When this one was born it should be the last. The last. It should have been born first, for it was the one she had truly wanted. Everything came in good time. Nothing left out, left over. She was strong, in three days she would be as well as ever. Better. A woman needed milk in her to have her full health.

“Mother, do you hear me?”

“I’ve been telling you—”

“Mother, Father Connolly’s here.”

“I went to Holy Communion only last week. Tell him I’m not so sinful as all that.”

“Father just wants to speak to you.”

He could speak as much as he pleased. It was like him to drop in and inquire about her soul as if it were a teething baby, and then stay on for a cup of tea and a round of cards and gossip. He always had a funny story of some sort, usually about an Irishman who made his little mistakes and confessed them, and the point lay in some absurd thing he would blurt out in the confessional showing his struggles between native piety and original sin.⁵ Granny felt easy about her soul. Cornelia, where are your manners? Give Father Connolly a chair. She had her secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her. All as surely signed and sealed as the papers for the new

270

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 258–274. Father Connolly’s visit reminds Granny Weatherall of visits by the priest in the past. Underline what happened during a different visit (lines 262–265). This memory leads her to think about God. Circle how Granny feels about religion (lines 269–274).

5. **original sin**: in Christian theology, the sin of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve, the first man and first woman, which is passed on to all persons.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Re-read lines 258–274. Father Connolly’s visit reminds Granny Weatherall of visits by the priest in the past. Underline what happened during a different visit (lines 262–265). This memory leads her to think about God. Circle how Granny feels about religion (lines 269–274).

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall 243

Forty Acres. Forever . . . heirs and assigns forever. Since the day the wedding cake was not cut, but thrown out and wasted. The whole bottom dropped out of the world, and there she was blind and sweating with nothing under her feet and the walls falling away. His hand had caught her under the breast, she had not fallen, there was the freshly polished floor with the green rug on it, just as before. He had cursed like a sailor's parrot and said, "I'll kill him for you." Don't lay a hand on him, for my sake leave something to God. "Now, Ellen, you must believe what I tell you. . . ."

So there was nothing, nothing to worry about any more, except sometimes in the night one of the children screamed in a nightmare, and they both hustled out shaking and hunting for the matches and calling, "There, wait a minute, here we are!" John, get the doctor now, Hapsy's time has come. But there was Hapsy standing by the bed in a white cap. "Cornelia, tell Hapsy to take off her cap. I can't see her plain."

Her eyes opened very wide and the room stood out like a picture she had seen somewhere. Dark colors with the shadows rising toward the ceiling in long angles. The tall black dresser gleamed with nothing on it but John's picture, enlarged from a little one, with John's eyes very black when they should have been blue. You never saw him, so how do you know how he looked? But the man insisted the copy was perfect, it was very rich and handsome. For a picture, yes, but it's not my husband. The table by the bed had a linen cover and a candle and a crucifix. The light was blue from Cornelia's silk lampshades. No sort of light at all, just frippery. You had to live forty years with kerosene lamps to appreciate honest electricity. She felt very strong and she saw Doctor Harry with a rosy **nimbus** around him.

"You look like a saint, Doctor Harry, and I vow that's as near as you'll ever come to it."

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IDENTIFY

In lines 274–275, Granny remembers another day the priest was there. What happened that day?

Granny was jilted.

AMBIGUITY

Re-read lines 275–283. Who do you think catches Granny Weatherall when she almost faints? Who threatens to kill George? (*Review Skill*)

It could be her father or her future husband, John.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Granny Weatherall's thoughts wander through time in lines 284–290. What periods of her life is she imagining?

She imagines when her children were little, when Hapsy was grown and having a baby, and Hapsy in the room now.

VOCABULARY

nimbus (nim'bas) *n.*: aura; halo.

"She's saying something."
"I heard you, Cornelia. What's all this carrying-on?"
"Father Connolly's saying—"

Cornelia's voice staggered and bumped like a cart in a bad road. It rounded corners and turned back again and arrived nowhere. Granny stepped up in the cart very lightly and reached for the reins, but a man sat beside her and she knew him by his hands, driving the cart. She did not look in his face, for she knew without seeing, but looked instead down the road where the trees leaned over and bowed to each other and a thousand birds were singing a Mass. She felt like singing too, but she put her hand in the bosom of her dress and pulled out a rosary, and Father Connolly murmured Latin in a very solemn voice and tickled her feet.⁶ My God, will you stop that nonsense? I'm a married woman. What if he did run away and leave me to face the priest by myself? I found another a whole world better. I wouldn't have exchanged my husband for anybody except St. Michael⁷ himself, and you may tell him that for me with a thank you in the bargain.

Light flashed on her closed eyelids, and a deep roaring shook her. **Cornelia, is that lightning? I hear thunder!** There's going to be a storm. Close all the windows. Call the children in . . .

Mother, here we are, all of us! "Is that you, Hapsy?" "Oh, no, I'm Lydia. We drove as fast as we could." Their faces drifted above her, drifted away. The rosary fell out of her hands and Lydia put it back. Jimmy tried to help, their hands fumbled together, and Granny closed two fingers around Jimmy's thumb. Beads wouldn't do, it must be something alive. She was so amazed her thoughts ran round and round. So, my dear Lord,

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320

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AMBIGUITY

Re-read lines 310–317. Granny Weatherall doesn't say who is in the cart beside her. Who do you think he is? (*Review Skill*)

He could be George, John, or Death.

READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 320–325. Granny Weatherall says she greatly loves her husband, John, so why does she keep thinking about George?

She has never gotten over his rejection of her.

READING CLOSELY

In lines 326–330, Granny Weatherall's mind moves from the present to the past. Circle details that take place in the present. Underline details that Granny imagines from the past.

6. **murmured . . . feet:** The priest is performing the sacramental last rites of the Roman Catholic Church, which include anointing the dying person's feet with oil.

7. **Michael:** most powerful of the four archangels in Jewish and Christian doctrine. In Christian art he is usually depicted as a handsome knight in white armor.

SKILLS PRACTICE

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

Reading Skills: Reading Closely The chart below lists some of the people in Granny Weatherall's life. In the right-hand column, fill in what you learned about each of the characters as Granny spoke or thought about them in this stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Character	What I Learned About the Character
George	He jilted Granny, but she still thinks about him.
John	He married Granny, understood her, and died young; she loved him.
Cornelia	She is good and dutiful, takes care of Granny when she is ill, and tries hard to please.
Hapsy	She is Granny's favorite and last child, who had a baby boy and died young.
Father Connolly	He is a friendly, gossipy priest, who is there for the family in good times and bad.

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The Jilting of Granny Weatherall 247

this is my death and I wasn't even thinking about it. My children have come to see me die. But I can't, it's not time. Oh, I always hated surprises. I wanted to give Cornelia the amethyst⁸ set—Cornelia, you're to have the amethyst set, but Hapsy's to wear it when she wants, and, Doctor Harry, do shut up. Nobody sent for you. Oh, my dear Lord, do wait a minute. I meant to do something about the Forty Acres, Jimmy doesn't need it and Lydia will later on, with that worthless husband of hers. I meant to finish the altar cloth and send six bottles of wine to Sister Borgia for her dyspepsia.⁹ I want to send six bottles of wine to Sister Borgia, Father Connolly, now don't let me forget.

Cornelia's voice made short turns and tilted over and crashed. "Oh, Mother, oh, Mother, oh, Mother. . ."

"I'm not going, Cornelia. I'm taken by surprise. I can't go." You'll see Hapsy again. What about her? "I thought you'd never come." Granny made a long journey outward, looking for Hapsy. What if I don't find her? What then? Her heart sank down and down, there was no bottom to death, she couldn't come to the end of it. The blue light from Cornelia's lampshade drew into a tiny point in the center of her brain, it flickered and winked like an eye, quietly it fluttered and dwindled. Granny lay curled down within herself, amazed and watchful, staring at the point of light that was herself; her body was now only a deeper mass of shadow in an endless darkness and this darkness would curl around the light and swallow it up. God, give a sign!

For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh, no, there's nothing more cruel than this—I'll never forgive it. She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light.

8. **amethyst** (am'i-thist) *n.*: purple or violet quartz gemstone, used in jewelry.

9. **dyspepsia** (dis-'pép'si-ə) *n.*: indigestion.

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READING CLOSELY

Re-read lines 335–346. Granny Weatherall realizes that she is dying. Why doesn't she want to die yet?

She still has things

she wants to do.

IDENTIFY

In line 350, underline what reconciles Granny Weatherall to dying.

VOCABULARY

dwindled ('dwin'daid) *v.*: diminished.

AMBIGUITY

Lines 361–365 can be interpreted several ways. Once again Granny Weatherall has been left alone without a sign from God. What sorrow do you think has wiped away all others? (*Review Skill*)

The sorrow could be

over being jilted, or

over dying, or it could

be the sorrow of being

alone in death—a sor-

row far worse than

any loss in life.

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Vocabulary Development

The Jilting of Granny Weatherall

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

DIRECTIONS: Write vocabulary words from the word box to complete the paragraph below. Not all words from the box will be used.

Word Box

tactful
clammy
plague
vanity
jilted
disputed
nimbus
dwindled

That Katherine Anne Porter's fame is well deserved cannot be (1) **disputed**. Who would contest that her use of language to create character and mood is the sign of a great literary talent? In this famous short story, she is able to draw readers into the personal, inner world of a dying grandmother who was (2) **jilted** by her lover on her wedding day sixty years before. This rejection in Granny Weatherall's early life would (3) **plague** her until she died. Porter creates a vibrant portrait of a strong-willed woman, who is blunt rather than (4) **tactful** in her dealings with her family.

ANALOGIES: USING SYNONYMS AND ANTONYMS

In a **word analogy**, two pairs of words have the same relationship. Often the words in each pair are **synonyms**—words with similar meanings—or **antonyms**—words with opposite meanings. In the analogy below, the words in each pair are synonyms.

ANGRY : FURIOUS :: humorous : funny

DIRECTIONS: Study each word analogy below to determine if the words in the complete pair are antonyms or synonyms. Then, fill in each blank with the appropriate word from the word box above. In the blank following each analogy, write "A" if the word pairs are antonyms or "S" if they are synonyms.

1. DESTROYED : CREATED :: **dwindled** : increased **A**
2. **nimbus** : HALO :: ocean : sea **S**
3. ARID : DRY :: **clammy** : damp **S**
4. **vanity** : MODESTY :: sanity : madness **A**

SKILLS FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills
Use vocabulary words from the word box to complete word analogies.

Before You Read

The Death of the Hired Man

by Robert Frost

LITERARY FOCUS: NARRATIVE POEM AND BLANK VERSE

A **narrative poem** is a poem that tells a story. As with a short story or novel, the story in a narrative poem includes a series of events with a beginning, a middle, and an end. A narrative poem also includes characters and, often, dialogue. Most of "The Death of the Hired Man" consists of a dialogue between a husband and wife as they discuss Silas, the hired man.

"The Death of a Hired Man" is written in **blank verse**, which is unrhymed iambic pentameter. An **iamb** is an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable: da DUM (" "). as in the word *confess*. In iambic pentameter, there are five iambs in each line.

A poem that is written to follow a more or less regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables is written in **meter**. If you try to beat out the meter in Frost's poem, you will find that Frost often varies the metric pattern. He does this so that his poem will not sound sing-song and become monotonous.

READING SKILLS: DRAWING INFERENCES

An **inference** is a guess based on information in the text and on your own knowledge and experience. When you draw inferences about characters, you make intelligent guesses about what the characters are like, what their feelings are, and why they do the things they do. You base your inferences on a character's appearance, behavior, and words, as well as on the comments and responses of other characters.

Use the Skill In "The Death of the Hired Man," Silas never speaks. You learn about Silas's character from what the husband and wife say about him. As you read, look for clues to his character, and make inferences about him.

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REVIEW SKILLS
As you read "The Death of the Hired Man," make inferences about the following literary element.

CHARACTERIZATION
The way a writer reveals the personality of a character in direct or indirect ways. The writer tells us directly what a character is like. In **indirect** characterization, the writer reveals character through the person's appearance, actions, words, and the effect on other people.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Understand characteristics of a narrative poem and blank verse.

Reading Skills
Make inferences about characters.

Review Skills
Understand direct and indirect characterization.