

# A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings and Vocabulary

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## Section Objective:

- Make predictions
- Make inferences about character's motivations
- Synthesize ideas from different sources
- Connect literature and the news
- Distinguish fact from opinion
- Understand, analyze, and compare universal themes
- Compare themes across genres
- Understand word origins and word analogies
- Create semantic charts and understand multiple meaning words

## *Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"*

### *Introduction to the Reading*

Today we finish the story, so the reading itself is not very long. While the angel originally attracted many visitors, the people stopped coming when another event drew the crowds, resulting in a major shift in the story. Additionally, the events now cover a longer period of time than the initial days presented in the first half of the story.

### *Reading Skills*

After reading the story, **determine how closely** any of your ideas matched the actual events described. For time in the story, the rains have collapsed the chicken coop, so the angel now lives in the house. **Describe** Elisenda's reaction to the changed lifestyle, and her reactions at the end of the story. Determine how her stated reaction matches what you would expect after having an angel as a visitor.

Elisenda benefits financially from her original **motivating idea**, charging admission. **List** the ways that she benefited from her investment; then determine how the angel continues to affect her life. **Explain** whether her reaction at the end fits your expectation for the ending of the story.

**Magical realism** is a literary style in which magical elements and events occur in otherwise ordinary and realistic situations.

A few times the story associates the angel with references to *Norwegian*. **Draw your own conclusions** about the significance of this detail for the story. Although the angel does not speak directly, the angel changes and makes some sounds. **Describe** these various changes and sounds. Based on this information, **make an inference** about what **motivates** the angel to act as he does.

Father Gonzaga continues to **test his theories** to **determine the facts** about the angel, including trying to compare the angel's dialect to Aramaic. Explain the significance that Aramaic would have in proving the reality of this angel. Analyze what specific **motivation** he has to continue his efforts when most of the people were more interested in carnival fun.

As we resume the story, we continue to see Elisenda and Father Gonzaga, but Pelayo basically disappears. **Draw your own conclusion** about why he no longer appears. **Determine** whether his absence detracts from the story or if his absence seems appropriate to the main focus of the story.

### *Literary Skills*

With their new fortune gained by charging admission, the couple built a new mansion "with balconies and gardens." For the rainy season, they had nets to keep out the crabs. **Examine the irony** to describe the reason that they put bars on the windows.

Angels are often associated with religion and with miracles, and indeed miracles happen in this story. However, the miracles described here seem to reflect "a certain mental disorder." **List the associations** you have with the word miracle; then list the "consolation miracles" mentioned in the story. **Analyze** these differences in terms of the **theme of appearance vs. reality**. Explain the significance of the cure that Father Gonzaga receives, in contrast to the other miracles.

Changes of seasons often represent a **universal theme** of rebirth and renewal. Identify the changes occurring in the story after the angel survived "his worst winter" and seemed "improved with the first sunny days."

The arrival of the girl who was changed into the spider closely represents a **story within a story**, similar to what you saw in reading *First They Killed My Father*. To analyze the two events, **create a two column list**, one for the angel-man and one for the spider-woman. Then **list** elements of each that seem parallel between the stories. Later in the column, list items that only apply to one side, but not to both. **Compare** the shift in focus from the angel to the spider-woman to **news stories** of people shifting their focus from one item to a new event. Based on this comparison, **determine** how closely the events of the story match a common human tendency to change a focus or switch an allegiance to something new.

The story of the woman changed into a spider resembles a **fable**, and fables usually have a moral. **Identify the moral** presented in telling the woman's tale. Then **identify the irony** used in both the content of the woman's story and in how it contrasts to the appearance of the angel.

In geographic location, the countries of Columbia and Cambodia both lie just north of the equator, so they have somewhat similar seasons. In *First They Killed My Father*, Loung describes the two seasons as wet and dry. **List the details** in this story that indicate a similar division of seasons.

### Vocabulary

For your **lists of references** to *birds* and *flight*, add two columns that continue the same references in the second half of the story. After you finish the lists, **determine** whether the types of references remain the same in both halves of the story, or if the emphasis changes in the second half. In a similar way, continue your **semantic chart** with references to *old* in the second half of the story. **Determine** whether the imagery changes to reflect a dynamic change in the story, or whether the references remain the same to reflect consistency in the author's characterization of the angel.

Father Gonzaga refers to phrases that have rather **obscure sources**. For example, he “held back the crowd’s frivolity” through the use of “formulas of maidservant inspiration.” This *maidservant* is Mary in the Bible, whom the *Angel Gabriel* addressed with the words “Hail Mary.” These words became a *formula* or common church prayer, which composers put to music with the words “Ave Maria.” This rather obscure reference to the “words of an angel” fit the role of Father Gonzaga in testing the angel. Another obscure reference appears when he attempted to “see how many times he could fit on the head of a pin.” This phrase refers to the monks in the Middle Ages who would consider philosophical questions, much like the way John Donne in his *Meditations*. When describing angels, once time the monks wondered “how many angels could fit on the head of a pin.” Using this phrase shows how Father Gonzaga tried any means possible to prove the angel’s identity.

As the angel continues to change toward the end of the story, he tries to hide his singing of *sea chanteys*. The chanteys are traditional songs chanted by sailors as they work. The reference ties back to the opening of the story, when Pelayo thought he was a castaway.

Specific vocabulary words: providential, tribulations, tarantula, brimstone, consultation, spectacle, rabbit warren, creolin, dungheap, unhinged, cannulae, decrepitude, chanteys, ungainly, senile vulture

