

# Just Lather, That's All and Vocabulary

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## Section Objectives

- Make predictions
- Make inferences about character motivations
- Evaluate an author's argument and evidence
- Analyze irony
- Analyze surprise endings and interpret contradictions
- Understand diction, context clues, and identify synonyms

## *"Just Lather, That's All" – Hernando Téllez*

### *Before You Read...*

### *Hernando Téllez (1908 – 1966):*

Hernando Téllez was born in Colombia's capital city, Bogotá. Téllez was a career politician serving as a member of the Colombian Parliament and an international ambassador. While Téllez is remembered primarily as a politician, he did enjoy success as a writer, composing short stories and essays for a variety of publications.

### *Literary Focus – Irony:*

Originally written in Spanish, Téllez's "Espuma y Nada Más" presents two forms of **irony**, both **dramatic** and **situational**. **Dramatic irony** occurs when the reader knows something that a character in the story does not; **situational irony** presents events that surprise even the reader. Téllez utilizes the events and setting of the text to surprise both his characters and his readers.

La Violencia ("The Violence") was a period of civil conflict in Colombia between supporters of the Colombian Liberal Party and the Colombian Conservative Party. Killings, torture, and censorship took place for about ten years (1948–1958) before much of the violence ended.



### *Introduction:*

Téllez's short story has a simple setting – the neighborhood barbershop. Captain Torres stops in the shop for a quick shave on a hot and steamy day. Because of the war that is going on, the climate in the neighborhoods is just as hot as the weather. Recognizing the captain immediately, the barber faces an **inner conflict** as to whether or not to kill the captain who has killed and mutilated so many of his people.

The barber's personal struggle is only matched by the **ironic** twist at the end of the story. While reading "Just Lather, That's All," notice how Téllez utilizes various forms of **irony**. Ultimately, decide for yourself how Téllez uses the events of the text to illustrate his view of human nature. The **characterization** of the captain and barber exemplify Téllez's stance of both mercy and fear.



Colombian Flag

### *Vocabulary Development:*

Colombia's national history during the twentieth-century is full of violence and division. Much of the **diction** Téllez uses throughout the text illustrates a tone of unrest. Consequently, much of the vocabulary takes a political angle or highlights the **inner conflict** faced by the characters.

Vocabulary: **foray, regime, emit, conscientious, tranquil, indelible**

Find definitions for the above terms. It is best to remember **synonyms** for each word. **Synonyms** are words that have similar meanings to one another. For example, "surprise" and "shock" are **synonyms**.

### *While You Read:*

Use **context clues** to guess the meanings of the above vocabulary words.

1. Make inferences, or educated guesses, about the character's motivations, thoughts, and feelings throughout the story.
2. Recognize examples of **irony** throughout the text. How does Téllez's use of **irony** enhance his writing?
3. What do the characters and events reveal about Téllez's view of politics and political turmoil?

### *After You Read...*

The following assessment sections and questions will require students to utilize their knowledge of the text as well as literary devices and terms including **irony**, **point of view**, **diction**, and **writer's motivation**. Students will interpret the text and make connections with the writer's background as well as the historical setting of the text.

### *Reading Check: Basic Comprehension*

1. What does Captain Torres hang on one of the clothes pegs when he enters the shop?
2. How does the reader recognize the barber's anxiety and nervous tension around Captain Torres?
3. What did the townspeople witness when they were forced to line up in the school-yard?
4. What does Captain Torres reveal to the barber before he leaves the shop?

### *Thinking Critically: Extended Comprehension and Analysis*

1. Explain how each character in "Just Lather, That's All" is at the mercy of the other.
2. In the story, how is there a shift from apparent **dramatic irony** to **situational irony**?
3. Toward the latter portion of the text, Téllez writes:

"So what? Murderer or hero? My destiny depended all on this blade. I could tilt my hand a little more, leaning in the razor a little bit more, and plunge it in. His skin would give way like silk, like rubber, like leather. There's nothing more tender than human skin and the blood was always there, ready to spill out. A razor like this never fails you. It's my best razor. But I don't want to be a murderer; no, sir. You came so that I could shave you. And I'm doing the job honorably... I don't want to stain myself with blood. Just lather, and nothing else."

In your opinion, what does this passage reveal about the **character** of the barber? Does he react the way you would expect? Are you surprised by his final decision of inactivity?

Upon leaving the shop, Captain Torres remarks, "They kept saying that you would kill me. I came to find out if it was true. But killing's not easy. Believe me, I know." Does this quotation reveal an **inner turmoil** of Captain Torres, or is he remarking about the lack of action on behalf of the barber?

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## Vocabulary Development:

Match the following terms with the appropriate definitions. Use *context clues* from the story to help you define each term.

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. _____ foray         | a. guided by principle |
| 2. _____ regime        | b. impossible to move  |
| 3. _____ emit          | c. government          |
| 4. _____ conscientious | d. attack              |
| 5. _____ tranquil      | e. discharge, emanate  |
| 6. _____ indelible     | f. calm; peaceful      |