

Section 2.1.13 – Just Lather, That’s All

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)

Colombian-born Hernando Téllez, in addition to being a published writer, once served as a member of the Colombian parliament. Much of Téllez’s writing centered on *La Violencia*, the name given to the series of civil wars and military uprisings that plagued his native country during his lifetime. “Just Lather, That’s All” or “Espuma y nada más”, is one example of his politically-themed writing. It is also commonly known under the title “Lather and Nothing Else.”

Literary Focus – Irony:

“Just Lather, That’s All” uses **dramatic** and **situational irony** in powerful ways. **Dramatic irony** occurs when the reader knows something that a character in a story does not; **situational irony** presents events that surprise even the reader.

Introduction:

The first section of “Just Lather, That’s All” sets the scene for readers. It is a hot day, and a military captain has come into a barber shop for a shave. The reader immediately learns that the barber is nervous, but the reasons for his trepidation as he sharpens his razor are not clear.

In the second paragraph of the story, Téllez reveals a bit more through clever narration: “I estimated he had a four-day beard. The four days taken up by the latest expedition in search of our troops.” This information lets the reader know that the narrator is no ordinary barber;

he is, in fact, a revolutionary, and the enemy of his client. At this early point in the story, it is natural to assume that the captain does not know this. Thus far, these events seem to point to dramatic irony.

However, the events in the second section of “Just Lather, That’s All”, especially the last few lines, take the story in an entirely new direction. When Captain Torres reveals that he had come to see if the barber would kill him, an astounding truth comes to light: Captain Torres knew all along that the barber was really a revolutionary – the enemy!

Hopefully, you made predictions as you read. Were they correct or incorrect? What hints in the story led you to predict certain events? Predicting is an important skill when reading a story, especially one as full of irony as “Just Lather, That’s All”.

While You Read. . .

1. Make inferences, or educated guesses, about the characters’ 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 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

4. What is the temperature like on the day Captain Torres visits the barber shop? What words and phrases in the story lead you to this conclusion?
5. How does the barber consider murdering Captain Torres? What words and phrases in the story reveal his plans?
6. For what does Captain Torres reach as he leaves the barber shop?

Thinking Critically: Extended Comprehension and Analysis

1. How do Téllez’s descriptions of the weather contribute to the events in the story? How might the story be different if the setting changed?
2. Why do you think the narrator decides not to murder Captain Torres? How might the story change if he chose to carry out the murder?
3. How much of Hernando Téllez’s personal life and experiences is shown through the events of “Just Lather, That’s All”?