

Lesson Name : 26

Lesson Title : The Feather Pillow

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Essential Instruction



Read Horacio Quiroga's book, ["The Feather Pillow."](#)

It is a good idea to use your digital notebook to keep notes on new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.

Making Inferences

Often when readers are reading a story, especially a suspenseful one, it is tempting to try to figure out the ending. In order to try and figure out the ending or the mystery of the story, a reader will have to make **inferences** from the details provided in the story. An **inference** is a conclusion that is made based on information provided in a text. The text may not state the conclusion directly. An **inference** may be correct or incorrect. As you read "The Feather Pillow," were you thinking about the ending of the story? Were you looking for lines and phrases that you could make **inferences** from? Once you reached the end, you discovered the cause for Alicia's death—a parasite hidden in her feather pillow. There are several lines in the story which could have led its reader to this conclusion. For example:

The illness never worsened during the daytime, but each morning she awakened pale as death, almost in a swoon. It seemed only at night that her life drained out of her in new waves of blood. Always when she awakened she had the sensation of lying collapsed in the bed with a million-pound weight on top of her.

Perhaps, if we had been reading more closely, we would have drawn the conclusion that perhaps something that was asleep during the day and awake at night could have been causing the illness. Or, we could have further looked into the weight she felt, which could have been the parasite, full of blood, still attached to her head.

Determining Main Idea

When reading narratives, a reader also might try to determine the **main idea** of the story. **Main idea** is the meaning or message of a given text.

Let's analyze "The Feather Pillow" for the **main idea**. What is the underlying meaning? There is no right or wrong answer to this question, as this is left for interpretation by the reader. However, perhaps it is a lesson that sometimes the answer is right in front of you. However, some might say that the message relates to the deep contrast between happy times and devastating times in life. It is ironic that the first time Alicia and her husband share an intimate touch and she cries out in happiness is the moment before she is first attacked by the parasite in her bed.

Cause and Effect

Cause and **effect** relationships are also important to a literary work. Sometimes there is an important event which occurs in the story which influences the rest of the narrative. **Cause** and **effect** is also linked closely to the *sequencing* of a story. In other words, it is related to the order in which events are placed in a story.

Now, let's consider the **cause** and **effect** relationships in "The Feather Pillow." Certainly, the most obvious is the **cause** of the parasite in her pillow affecting the health and life of young Alicia. You might also consider smaller events, such as Alicia's light attack of influenza, which caused her to spend long amounts of time in bed, therefore making her more vulnerable to the parasite.

Synthesizing Information

Another way readers sometimes draw conclusions about a narrative piece is to **synthesize information** from various sources. These various sources can be sources within the literary work, various characters, and perspectives. They can also be outside sources. For example, if a reader was left with questions about a time period, an object, or an occupation in a literary work, he or she might conduct research in order to learn more about the story.

Symbolism

Symbolism in "The Feather Pillow" can be interpreted differently by different readers. Could the parasite in her pillow be a **symbol** for something? Some readers may feel that the parasite is a **symbol** for the draining of poor Alicia caused by her husband's behavior toward her.

Similes

A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike things using words such as *like* or *as*. There is only one **simile** in "The Feather Pillow." The line reads, "She had determined, however, to cast a veil over her former dreams and live like a sleeping beauty in the hostile house." In order to understand the full meaning of these **similes**, a reader must be familiar with the vocabulary involved. If you encounter any **similes** with which you are not familiar in the vocabulary, be sure to look the words up in a dictionary.

Denotative and Connotative Words

Denotation is the literal meaning of a word. Connotation is an association (positive or negative) that is carried with a word. For example, frugal and cheap can both refer to a person's carefulness with money. However, frugal carries a positive connotation, and cheap generally carries a negative connotation. Consider the denotations and connotations of your vocabulary words found in Quiroga's "The Feather Pillow."

Word Origins

Word origin refers to the place and the time when a word was first created and used and usually discusses the way a word has changed over time. This can be important for several reasons. The time that the author wrote the story may determine or affect the intended meaning of the word. Frequently, there are several

definitions listed in the dictionary when looking up a word; knowing **word origins** will help you choose the correct one. Consider looking up the **word origins** for each of your vocabulary words. View an example of one useful site, the [Online Etymology Dictionary](#), in a new window.

Context Clues

Context clues are “helper” words that give hints to the meaning of an unfamiliar word. For example in “The Feather Pillow,” consider the following sentences: “Night after night, since Alicia had taken to her bed, this abomination had stealthily applied its mouth—its *proboscis* one might better say—to the girl’s temples, sucking her blood.” Even if you aren’t sure of the meaning of the word *proboscis*, you can use the clues in the sentence to infer that *proboscis* refers to the protruding mouth parts on an insect. Use the **context clues** around your vocabulary words or any other unfamiliar words in order to help you determine their meaning.



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Vocabulary

Understanding the words used in a story can aid your understanding of the story itself. Here are some words from Horacio Quiroga’s “The Feather Pillow”:

1. **furtive** – adj. – attempting to avoid notice or attention; secretive
2. **abandonment** – noun – the act of having been neglected, left
3. **insidiously** – adv. – proceeding in a seemingly harmless way but actually with serious effect
4. **anthropoid** – noun – resembling a human, especially in shape or outward appearance
5. **minute** – adj. – attentive to or concerned with even the smallest details
6. **anemia** – noun – a lack of power, vigor, vitality, or colorfulness due to blood disorder
7. **crepuscular** – adj. – appearing or active in twilight
8. **delirium** – noun – a more or less temporary disorder of the mental faculties, as in fevers, disturbances of consciousness
9. **abomination** – noun – a thing that causes disgust or hatred

10. **vertiginous** – adj. – inclined to change quickly; unstable

11. **impassive** – adj. – not feeling or showing emotion