

Unit 12

Floyd Dell

The Blanket

By the end of the unit, the students will be able to:

- read a text to make connections between characters, events, motives and causes of conflicts in texts across cultures.
- analyze story elements: characters, events, setting, plot, theme, tone, point of view.
- recognize the author's purpose and point of view and their effects on the texts.
- analyze the conflict in a story or literary selection. Explore options to resolve the conflict. Propose another resolution.
- identify universal themes present in literature across all cultures.
- demonstrate heightened awareness of conventions and dynamics of group discussion and interaction, to:
 - present and explain one's point of view clearly
 - support or modify one's opinion with reasons
 - acknowledge other's contribution
 - share information and ideas
- clarify, rephrase, explain, expand and restate information and ideas.
- evaluate and use expression for various functions and co-function:
 - recount
 - describe
- illustrate the use of dictionary for finding appropriate meaning and spelling.
- illustrate the use of gerunds and gerund phrases.

The Blanket

It was a fine September night. A thin white moon rose over the valley. Peter, eleven years old, did not see the moon. He did not feel the cool September breeze blow into the kitchen, for his thoughts were fixed on a red and black blanket on the kitchen table.

The blanket was a gift from his Dad to his Granddad a going-away gift. They said that Granddad was going away that's why they called it "going away."

Peter had not really believed his Dad would send Granddad away. But now — there it was — the going-away gift. Dad had bought it that very morning. And this was the last evening he and his Granddad would have with each other.

Together the old man and the young boy washed the supper dishes. Dad had gone out . . . with the woman he was to marry. He would not be back for some time. When the dishes were finished, the old man and the boy went outside and sat under the moon.

"I'll get my harmonica and play for you," the old man said. "I'll play some of the old tunes."

But instead of the harmonica, he brought out the blanket. It was a big, double blanket.

"Now, isn't that a fine blanket?" said the old man, smoothing it over his knees. "And isn't your father a kind man to be giving the old man a blanket like this to go away with? It costs something; it did — look at the wool in it! And warm it will be these cold winter nights to come. There will be no other blanket like it up there."

It was like Granddad to be saying that. He was trying to make it easier. Ever



since they had talked about "going away," Granddad had said it was his idea. Imagine — leaving a warm house and friends to go to that building ... that government place where he would be with so many other old fellows, having the best of everything. But Peter had not really believed Dad would do it ... until this night when he brought home the blanket.

"Oh, yes, it's a fine blanket," Peter said and got up and went into the house. He wasn't the kind to cry, and besides, he was too old for that. He had just gone in to get Granddad's harmonica.

The blanket dropped to the floor as the old man took the harmonica. It was the last night they would have together. Neither the old man nor the young boy had to say a word. Granddad played a few notes and then said, "You'll remember this one."

The thin moon was high overhead and the gentle breeze blew down the valley. The last time, Peter thought. He would never hear Granddad play again. It was well that Dad was moving to a new house — away from here. He did not want to sit here outside on fine evenings under a white moon with Granddad gone. The music ended, and the two sat for a few minutes in silence. Then Granddad spoke. "Here is something happier."

Peter sat and looked out over the valley. Dad would marry that girl. Yes, that girl who had kissed him and who had said she would try to be a good mother to him and all that.

The tune stopped suddenly and Granddad said, "It's a poor tune, except to be dancing to." And then, "It's a fine girl your father's going to marry. He will feel young again with a pretty wife like that. And what would an old fellow like me do around the house ... getting in the way ... an old fool with all the talk about backaches and pains!

"And then there will be babies coming, and I don't want to be around listening to them cry all hours of the night. No, it's best that I leave. Well, one more tune or two, and then we will get to bed, get some sleep. In the morning I'll get my new blanket and take my leave. Listen to this. It's a bit of a sad tune but a nice one for a night like this."

They did not hear the two people coming down the road, Dad and the

pretty girl with a hard bright face like a doll. But they heard her laugh and the tune stopped suddenly.

Dad did not say a word, but the girl walked up to Granddad and said prettily, "I'll not be seeing you in the morning, so I came over to say good-bye."

"It's kind of you," said Granddad, looking down at the floor; and then seeing the blanket at his feet, he bent down to pick it up. "And will you look at this," he said, sounding himself like a little boy. "Isn't this a fine blanket my son has given me to go away with?"

"Yes," she said, "it's a fine blanket." She felt the wool again ... and said, "A fine blanket indeed." She turned to Dad and said to him coldly, "Must have cost a pretty penny."

Dad cleared his throat ... "I ... I wanted him to have the best."

The girl stood there, still looking at the blanket. "Mmmm ... it's a double one, too."

"Yes," the old man said, "it's a double one ... a fine blanket for an old fellow to be going away with."

The boy suddenly walked into the house. He could hear the girl, still talking about the expensive blanket. He heard his Dad get angry in his slow way. And now, she was leaving. As Peter came out, the girl turned and called back, "No matter what you say, he doesn't need a double blanket!"

Dad looked at her with a funny look in his eye.

"She is right, Dad," the boy said. "Granddad doesn't need a double blanket. Here, Dad," — and he held out a pair of scissors — "Cut it, Dad ... cut the blanket in two."

Both of them looked at the boy surprised.

"Cut it in two, I tell you, Dad. And keep the other half!"

"That's not a bad idea," said Granddad gently. "I don't need such a big blanket."

"Yes," the boy said, "a single blanket is enough for an old man when he's sent away. We'll save the other half, Dad; it will come in useful later."

"Now what do you mean by that?" asked Dad.

"I mean," said the boy slowly, "that I'll give it to you, Dad, when you're old and I'm sending you away."

There was a big silence, and then Dad went over to Granddad and stood before him, not saying a word.

But Granddad understood, for he put out his hand and laid it on Dad's shoulder. Peter was watching them. And he heard Granddad whisper softly "It's all right, son. I knew you didn't mean it. ..." And then Peter cried. But it didn't matter because all three were crying together.

About the Author

Floyd Dell (1887–1969) was born in 1887 in Pike County, Missouri. His family experienced a great deal of poverty. At school Dell developed a love of reading. At sixteen, he joined the Socialist Party and gave speeches on street-corners about his political beliefs. He also wrote for a small Socialist monthly, *Tri-City Workers' Magazine*. He also worked as a sub-reporter for the *Davenport Times*. He later joined the *Chicago Evening Post* and by 1911 was editor of the newspaper's *Friday Literary Review*. Dell believed that the everyday life of the middle and working classes provided subjects worthy of serious literary treatment.

Glossary

Words	Meanings
breeze (n)	a gentle or light wind
harmonica (n)	a small wind musical instrument; also called mouth organ
pretty penny	a large sum of money

Reading Comprehension

Answer the following questions.

1. How significant is the title of the story 'The Blanket'?
2. Analyze the conflict in the story 'The Blanket'? How is it resolved?
3. Analyze the tone of the story 'The Blanket'. Is it joyous or sorrowful? Explain.
4. What attitude does Peter show about his Dad and Granddad?
5. How is the theme of 'The Blanket' the theme of our disintegration of society as well?
6. Describe your relationship with different family members. Who your relationship is the most cordial with and who you stay aloof from and why? Explain.
7. If Peter had been exposed to the mass media, social media and internet, would he have developed the same intimacy with the Grandfather as he did in the story? Elaborate.
8. Why does Peter's Dad get angry with the girl he is going to marry?
9. What does our religion teach about old parents?

Writing Suggestions

Ask your parents about the role that their grandparents have played in their social, cultural and ethical grooming; now compare and contrast it with the part that your grandparents have in yours. Has it shrunk or expanded? If you think that their role is diminishing, write about its causes and what is its effects on our life.

Oral Communication

A. Divide the class into groups of five students each and hold group discussion on the topic, "The Over Use of Internet and Social Media has wrecked Social Bond Among the Family Members".

B. Oral recount

- A recount retells an experience or an event that happened in the past.
- The purpose of a recount can be to inform, entertain or to reflect.
- A recount can focus on a specific section of an event or retell the entire story.

- A recount should always be told in the order that things happened.

Activity:

- Listen to a loud reading of the 'The Blanket' recorded by the Teacher.
- Listen to the text a second time and write down the significant events.
- Listen to the text a third time to check and add to what you have written.
- With the help of these written notes, each student should give oral recount of the story and explain the different messages it conveys.

Vocabulary and Grammar

Vocabulary

Find the meaning of *passed* and *past* in a dictionary, identify their parts of speech and then use them correctly to fill in the blanks.

1. The museum is on the right, just _____ the church.
2. My brother _____ his exams with great results.
3. We've just _____ the exit for Leeds. We'll have to turn around.
4. Go _____ the post office then turn left and you'll see your hotel.
5. He thinks he was a fool in his _____ life.

GRAMMAR

A. Complete the sentences with the gerund form of the verbs in parentheses.

1. She is good at (paint) _____.
2. He is crazy about (play) _____.
3. I don't like (play) _____ cards.
4. They are afraid of (swim) _____ in the sea.
5. You should give up (smoke) _____.
6. Sami dreams of (be) _____ a doctor.
7. He is interested in (make) _____ friends.
8. My uncle is afraid of (go) _____ by plane.
9. We insist on (cook) _____ the dinner ourselves.

B. Use the verbs in parenthesis either as gerund or the infinitive:

1. I couldn't sleep so I tried (drink) some hot milk.
2. She tried (reach) the book on the high shelf but she was too small.
3. They tried (get) to the party on time but the bus was delayed.
4. We tried (open) the window, but it was so hot outside, it didn't help.
5. He tried (get) a job in a newspaper firm but they wouldn't hire him.
6. He tried (get) a job in a newspaper firm but he still wasn't satisfied.
7. You should stop (smoke), it's not good for your health.
8. We stopped (study) because we were tired.
9. They will stop (have) lunch at twelve.
10. We stopped (have) a rest because we were really sleepy.
11. Oh no! I forgot (buy) milk.
12. Please don't forget (pick up) some juice on your way home.
13. I forget (lock) the door, but I'm sure I must have locked it.
14. Have we studied this before? I've forgotten (learn) it.
15. Please remember (bring) your homework.
16. I remember (go) to the beach as a child.
17. Finally I remembered (bring) your book! Here it is.
18. Do you remember (eat) steak in that little restaurant in Lahore?
19. I regret (tell) you the train has been delayed.
20. I regret (tell) Nighat my secret. Now she has told everyone.

C. Replace the gerund by an infinitive and the infinitive by a gerund in the following sentences.

1. To laugh is better than to frown.
2. Writing a story is not easy.
3. He likes to collect books and does not like giving them away.
4. Flying kites is a good sport, but to bet on them is bad.
5. He likes to read and to write.
6. She likes cooking and painting.
7. Seeing is believing.
8. She loves making dolls.
9. To wait for people who were late made him angry.
10. To sell insurance is a pretty boring job.

D. Decide whether the following sentences contain a Gerund or a Progressive.

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| 1. He likes reading books. | (Gerund/Progressive) |
| 2. He is reading books. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 3. Reading books can be great fun. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 4. He is interested in reading books. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 5. He was reading books. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 6. He has been reading books for two hours. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 7. Instead of reading books Henry went to bed. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 8. Do you like reading books? | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 9. He had been reading books. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |
| 10. His hobby is reading books. | (Gerund/ Progressive) |

Teacher's Guideline:

Explain and revise with the students the use of gerund and gerund phrases.