

Unit

4

From Mother ... With Love

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

- analyze story elements: characters, events, setting, plot, theme, tone, point of view.
- identify the speaker or narrator in a selection.
- recognize the author's purpose and point of view and their effects on the texts.
- identify universal themes present in literature across all cultures.
- read a text to:
 - make connections between characters, events, motives and causes of conflicts in texts across cultures.
- identify and demonstrate use of relative pronouns.
- use various reference sources to refine vocabulary for interpersonal academic workplace situation including figurative, idiomatic and technical vocabulary.



FROM MOTHER,
WITH LOVE.

From Mother ... With Love

The day that Minta Hawley grew up was a crisp golden day in early September.

Afterwards she was to remember everything about that day with poignant clarity. She remembered the slapping sound the waves made, the pungent smell of the logs burning, even the gulls that soared and swooped overhead; but most of all she remembered her father's face when he told her.

It began like any other Saturdays, with Minta lying in bed an extra hour. Breakfast was always lazy and unhurried on Saturday mornings. The three of them in the breakfast room — Minta's father engrossed in his paper; her mother flying around in a gaily colored housecoat, mixing waffles and frying bacon; Minta setting the table.

They talked, the casual happy talk of people who love each other and don't have to make conversation. About neighborhood doings ... about items in the paper ... about the clothes Minta would need when she went away to school in a couple of weeks.

It was after the dishes were finished that Minta's father asked her if she would like to go down to the beach for a little while. "Low tide," he said. "Might get a few clams."

Minta nodded agreement, but her mother made a little face. "Horrors, clam chowder for another week!"

"Sure you wouldn't like to go, Mary?" Minta's father asked. "The salt air might help your headache."

"No. You two run along. I'll curl up with an apple and a television program." She yawned and stretched, looking almost as young as Minta.

Minta ran upstairs and got into her heavy shoes and jeans. "Shall I call Sally and ask her if she wants to go?" She yelled, leaning far over the banister.

"Let's just go by ourselves this time," her father answered rather shortly. He was silent as they drove toward the beach, but it wasn't the companionable silence that Minta had come to expect from him. There

was something grim about it.

"He's going to talk to me about school," Minta told herself. "He's going to try to talk me out of it again."

It was funny the way her father had acted when she announced her intention of going to MaryHill this term. It had always been such an accepted thing; her mother had graduated from MaryHill and it followed that Minta should be enrolled there as a matter of course.

Last year was different. With mother just recovering from that operation it was natural that he should expect Minta to stay home; she had even wanted to stay. But now going to MaryHill was something special. She would live in a dormitory and be part of all the campus fun. It wasn't as if MaryHill were clear across the country, either, she'd probably be getting home every month or so . . . and there were the Christmas holidays . . . and then spring vacation.

Minta's chin was lifted in a stubborn line as her father parked the car and went around to get the shovels and pail from the trunk.

It wasn't like him to be so stubborn; usually he was jolly and easy going and inclined to leave such matters entirely up to Minta's mother.

She followed him down to the beach, her boots squishing in the wet sand. The tide was far out and farther up the beach she could see bent figures busily digging along the water's edge.

A scattered beach fire smoldered near the bank and Minta poked it into place and revived it with splinters of driftwood until she had coaxed back a steady warming blaze. When she sat back on her heels to smile up at her father, she felt her throat constrict with a smothering fear. His eyes looked the way they had when...

When?

Suddenly she remembered. He was looking at her and trying to smile, just the way he had looked at her the time her appendix burst and they were taking her to the hospital. She could almost hear the wail of the ambulance siren and feel the way he had held her hands tightly, trying to make it easier. His eyes had told her then, as they told her now, that he would a thousand times rather bear the pain than watch her suffer.

It seemed like a long time that she knelt there by the beach fire, afraid to move, childishly willing herself to wake from the nightmarish feeling that gripped her.

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet and they started walking up the beach slowly, not toward the group of people digging clams, but in the other direction, toward the jagged pile of rocks that jutted out into the bay.

She heard a strange voice, her own voice.

"I thought . . . I thought you wanted to talk to me about school, but it isn't that, is it, Father?"

His fingers tightened around hers. "In a way it is . . . about school."

And then, before the feeling of relief could erase the fear he went on. "I went to see Dr. Morton last week, Minta. I've been seeing him pretty regularly these last few months."

She flashed a quick frightened look up at him. "You aren't ill?"

"No." He sighed and it was a heartbreaking sound. "No. It isn't me. It's your mother. That's why I don't want you to go to Mary Hill this year."

"But . . . but she's feeling so much better, Dad. Except for these headaches once in a while. She's even taking on a little weight"

She broke off and stopped walking and her hand was steady on his arm. "Tell me," she said quietly.

The look was back in his eyes again but this time Minta scarcely noticed it, she was aware only of his words, the dreadful echoing finality of his words.

Her mother was going to die.

To die.

Her mother.

To die, the doctor said.

Three months, perhaps less . . .

Her mother who was gay and scatterbrained and more fun than anyone else in the world. Her mother who could be counted on to announce in the spring that she was going to do her Christmas shopping early this year, and then left everything until the week before Christmas.

She was so pretty and caring. She always had time for things like

listening to new records and helping paste pictures in Minta's scrapbook.

She wasn't ever sick — except for the headaches and the operation last year which she had laughingly dismissed as a rest cure.

"I shouldn't have told you." Her father was speaking in a voice that Minta had never heard from him before. A voice that held loneliness and fear and a sort of angry pain. "I was afraid I couldn't make you understand, why you had to stay home . . . why you'd have to forget about Mary Hill for this year." His eyes begged her to forgive him and for some reason she wanted to put her arms around him, as if she were much older and stronger.

"Of course you had to tell me," she said steadily. "Of course I had to know." And then "Three months but Dad, that's Christmas." He took her hand and tucked it under his arm and they started walking again.

It was like walking through a nightmare. The steady squish-squish of the wet sand and the little hollows their feet made filling up almost as soon as they passed.

He talked quietly, explaining, telling her everything the doctor had said, and Minta listened without tears, without tears, without comment.

She watched his face as though it were the face of a stranger. She thought about a thousand unrelated things.

She remembered all the times they had gone swimming this past summer. Minta and her father loved to swim but her mother had preferred to curl up on a beach blanket and watch them. "You have the disposition of a Siamese cat," Minta had accused her mother laughingly.

"A cushion by the fire in the winter and a cushion in the sun in the summer . . ."

"And a bowl of cream nearby," her mother had agreed instantly. She was always good-natured about their teasing.

It was like coming back from a long journey when her father stopped talking and they turned back toward the car.

"So that's why I can't let you go away, Midge." Her father's voice was very low and he didn't seem to realize that he had called her by the

babyish name she had discarded when she started to first grade. "It isn't just your mother I'm thinking about . . . it's me. I need you."

She looked at him quickly and her heart twisted with pity. He did need her. He would need her more than ever.

In the car she sat very close to him.

"We didn't get the clams," she reminded him once, but he only nodded.

Just before they reached home, he reached over and took her hand in a tight hurting grip.

"We can't tell her, Minta. The doctor left it up to me and I said not to tell her. We have to let her have this last time . . . this last little time . . . without that hanging over her. We have to go on as if everything were exactly the same."

She nodded to show that she understood. After a moment she spoke past the ache in her throat. "About school. I'll . . . I'll tell her that I decided to wait until next year."

It seemed impossible that life could go on exactly as before. The small private world peopled by the three of them was as snug and warm and happy as though no shadow had touched them.

They watched television and argued good-naturedly about the programmes. Minta's friends came and went and there was the usual round of parties and games.

"I really must get at my Christmas shopping," she mentioned the day she was wrapping trick-or-treat candy for Halloween.

Minta shook her head and sighed gustily.

Her mother started this "I-must-get-at-my-christmas-shopping" routine every spring and followed it up until after Thanksgiving but she never actually got around to it until two or three days before Christmas.

It was amazing that Minta could laugh and say, "Oh, you ..." the way she did year after year.

It was a knife turning in her heart when her mother straightened up from the gay cellophane-wrapped candies and brushed a stray wisp of taffy-colored hair back from one flushed cheek.

"Don't laugh," she said, pretending to be stern. "You know you're

just exactly like me."

It was a warming thought. She was like her mother. Inside, where it really mattered she was like her mother, even though she had her father's dark eyes and straight black hair, even though she had his build and the firm chin of all the Hawleys.

She wanted to put her arm around her mother and hug her hard. She wanted to say, "I hope I am like you. I want to be."

But instead she got up and stretched and wrinkled her nose.

"Perish forbid," she said, "that I should be such a scatterbrain."

She was rewarded by the flash of a dimple in her mother's cheek.

It seemed to Minta, as week followed week, that the day at the beach had been something out of a nightmare: something that she could push away from her and forget about. Sometimes she looked at her father, laughing, teasing them, or howling about the month-end bills and she thought, "It didn't happen . . . it isn't true."

And then at night she would lie sleepless in her room, the pretty room that had been reconverted from her nursery. She watched the moonlight drift patterns across the yellow bedspread and the breeze billow the curtains that her mother had made by hand, because that was the only way she could be sure of an absolute match.

"Yellow is such a difficult color to match," she had explained around a mouthful of pins.

And in the dark hours of the night Minta had known it wasn't a nightmare. It was true. It was true.

One windy November day she hurried home from school and found her mother in the yard raking leaves. She wore a bright kerchief over her head and she had Minta's old polo coat belted around her. She looked young and gay and carefree and her eyes were shining.

"Hi!" She waved the rake invitingly. "Change your clothes and come help. We'll have a smudge party in the alley."

Minta stopped and leaned on the gate. She saw with a new awareness that there were dark circles under her mother's eyes and that the flags of color in her cheeks were too bright. But she managed a

chuckle.

"I wish you could see yourself, Mom. For two cents I'd get my camera and take a picture of you."

She ran into the house and got her camera and they took a whole roll of pictures.

"Good," her mother said complacently. "Now we can show them to your father the next time he accuses me of being a Sally-Sit-by-the-Fire. They piled the leaves into a huge damp stack, with the help of half a dozen neighborhood children. It wouldn't burn properly but gave out with clouds of thick, black, wonderfully pungent smoke.

Her mother was tired that night. She lay on the davenport and made out her Christmas card list while Minta and her father watched the wrestling matches. It was like a thousand other such evenings but in some unaccountable way it was different.

"Because it's the last time," Minta told herself. "The last time we'll ever rake the leaves and make a bonfire in the alley. The last time I'll snap a picture of her with her arms around the Kelly kids. The last time . . . the last time . . ."

She got up quickly and went out into the kitchen and made popcorn in the electric popper, bringing a bowl to her mother first, remembering just the way she liked it, salt and not too much butter.

But that night she awakened in the chilly darkness of her room and began to cry, softly, her head buried in the curve of her arm. At first it helped, loosening the tight bands about her heart, washing away the fear and the loneliness, but when she tried to stop she found that she couldn't. Great wracking sobs shook her until she could no longer smother them against her pillow. And then the light was on and her mother was there bending over her, her face concerned, her voice soothing.

"Darling, what is it? Wake up, baby, you're having a bad dream."

"No . . . no, it isn't a dream," Minta choked. "It's true . . . it's true."

The thin hand kept smoothing back her tumbled hair and her mother went on talking in the tone she had always used to comfort a much smaller Minta.

She was aware that her father had come to the doorway. He said nothing, just stood there watching them while Minta's sobs diminished into hiccupy sighs.

Her mother pulled the blanket up over Minta's shoulder and gave her a little spank. "The idea! Gollywogs, at your age," she said reprovingly. "Want me to leave the light on in case your spook comes back?"

Minta shook her head, blinking against the tears that crowded against her eyelids, even managing a wobbly smile.

She never cried again.

Not even when the ambulance came a week later to take her mother to the hospital.

Not even when she was standing beside her mother's high white hospital bed, holding her hand tightly, forcing herself to chatter of inconsequential things.

"Be sure that your father takes his vitamin pills, won't you, Minta? He's so careless unless I'm there to keep an eye on him."

"I'll watch him like a beagle," Minta promised lightly. "Now you behave yourself and get out of here in a hurry, you hear?"

Not even at the funeral...

The friends and relatives came and went and it was as if she stood on the sidelines watching the Minta who talked with them and answered their questions. As if her heart were encased in a shell that kept it from breaking.

She went to school and came home afterwards to the empty house. She tried to do the things her mother had done but even with the help of well-meaning friends and neighbors it was hard. She tried not to hate the people who urged her to cry.

"You'll feel better, dear," her Aunt Grace had insisted and then had lifted her handkerchief to her eyes and walked away when Minta had only stared at her with chilling indifference.

She overheard people talking about her mother.

"She never knew, did she?" They asked.

And always Minta's father answered, "No, she never knew. Even at

the very last, when she was waiting for the ambulance to come, she looked around the bedroom and said, "I must get these curtains done up before Christmas."

Minta knew that her father was worried about her and she was sorry, but it was as if there were a wall between them, a wall that she was too tired to surmount.

One night he came to the door of her room where she was studying.

"I wonder if you'd like to go through those clothes before your Aunt Grace takes them to the church bazaar," he began haltingly. And then when she looked up at him, not understanding, he went on gently, "Your mother's clothes. We thought someone might as well get some good out of them."

She stood up and closed the book and went past him without another word, but she closed the door behind her when she went into her mother's room.

There were some suit boxes by the closet door and Minta vaguely remembered that the women from the bazaar committee had called several times.

Her hands felt slightly unsteady as she pulled open the top dresser drawer and looked down at the stacks of clean handkerchiefs, the stockings in their quilted satin case, the gloves folded into tissue wrappings.

"I can't do it," she told herself, but she got a box and started putting the things into it, trying not to look at them, trying to forget how delighted her mother had been with the pale green slip, trying not to remember.

Once she hesitated and almost lifted a soft wool sweater from the pile that was growing in the suit box. She had borrowed it so often that her mother used to complain that she felt like a criminal every time she borrowed it back again. She didn't mean it though...she loved having Minta borrow her things.

Minta put the sweater with the other things and closed the box

firmly.

Now, the things in the closet —

Opening the door was almost like feeling her mother in the room beside her. A faint perfume clung to most of her garments. The house-coat . . . the woolly robe . . . the tan polo coat . . . the scarlet jacket . . . her new blue wool with the peg top skirt.

Minta started folding the things with almost frantic haste, stuffing them into boxes, cramming the lids on and then starting on another box.

At the very back of the closet were the two pieces of matched luggage that had been her mother's last birthday gift from her father. They were heavy when she tried to move them — too heavy.

She brought them out into the room and put them side by side on her mother's bed. Her breath caught in her throat when she opened them.

Dozens and dozens of boxes, all tied with bright red ribbon, the gift tags written out in her mother's careful script. Gaily colored Christmas stickers, sprigs of holly To Minta from Mother and Dad . . . to Grace from Mary . . . to John from Mary . . . to the Kelly Gremlins from Aunt Mary . . . to Uncle Art from the Hawley family . . .

"So you knew," Minta whispered the words. "You knew all the time."

She looked down in surprise as a hot tear dropped on her hand and she dashed it away almost impatiently.

She picked up another package and read the tag. To Minta from Mother . . . with love.

Without opening it she knew that it was a picture frame and she remembered the way she had teased her mother to have a good photograph taken.

"The only one I have of you looks like a fugitive from a chain gang," she had pointed out. "I can't very well go away to school next year with *that*."

She put the package back in the suitcase with all the others and carried the cases back into the closet.

Poor Dad, she thought.

"She never knew," she could hear him saying. "Not even at the

last."Minta opened the box beside the bed and took out the sweater and the pale green slip.

"You know perfectly well that you're just exactly like me," she remembered her mother saying.

She brushed the tears away and went down the stairs and out into the cheerless living room.

"I'd like to keep these things, Dad," she said in her most matter-of-fact voice, and she showed him the sweater and slip. "The slip is a little big but I'll grow into it. It . . . it looks like her, I think."

She went around the room, snapping on the lamps, turning on the television that had been silent for so long. She was aware that his eyes followed her, that he could hardly avoid noticing the tear stains on her cheeks.

"I think I'll have an apple," she said. "Want one?"

He nodded. "Sure. Bring me one as long as you're making the trip."

It was natural. It was almost like old time, except that the blue chair by the fireplace was vacant.

She went out into the kitchen hurriedly.

"I'll tell him that I pestered mother to do her shopping early this year," she told herself as she got the apples from the refrigerator. "I'll tell him that it was my idea about the photographs. She wanted him to believe that she didn't know."

The vitamin pills were pushed back on a shelf. She took them out of the refrigerator and put them on the windowsill where she would be sure to see them in the morning.

When she came back into the living room she noticed that a light in a Christmas wreath was winking on and off in the Kelly's window across the street.

"I guess we should start thinking about Christmas, Dad." She tossed him an apple as she spoke and he caught it deftly.

She hesitated for just a moment and then walked over and sat down in the blue chair by the fire, as if she belonged there, and looked across at her father, and smiled.

About the author:

Zoa Sherburne (30 September 1912 – 10 October 1995) was an American author, most known for her young adult fiction. Sherburne was born in Seattle, Washington and began writing in elementary school. Sherburne went on to be a very prolific writer, publishing over 300 short stories in magazines. She went on to publish thirteen novels, which together have been translated into over 27 languages. One of her books, *Stranger in the House*, about a family dealing with the return of their mother from a mental institution, became a movie: *Memories Never Die* (1982). Her novels often dealt with girls in difficult circumstances: coping with a mother's alcoholism (Jennifer), with the remarriage of a parent.

Glossary

Words	Meaning
appendix (n)	a tube-shaped sac attached to and opening into the lower end of the large intestine in humans and some other mammals. In humans the appendix is small and has no known function, but in rabbits, hares, and some other herbivores it is involved in the digestion of cellulose.
beagle	a small hound of a breed with a short coat, used for hunting hares.
blanked (v)	deliberately ignore (someone).
bonfire (n)	a large open-air fire used for burning rubbish or as part of a celebration.
cellophane (n)	a thin transparent wrapping material made from viscose.
chowder	a rich soup typically containing fish, clams, or corn with potatoes and onions.
clams	a marine bivalve mollusc with shells of equal size.
closet	a tall cupboard or wardrobe with a door, used for storage.
davenport (n)	an ornamental writing desk with drawers and a sloping surface for writing; a large heavily upholstered sofa.
deftly (adv)	in a way that is neatly skilful and quick in movement.
disposition	a person's inherent qualities of mind and character.
dormitory	a large bedroom for a number of people in a school or institution.

driftwood (n)	pieces of wood which are floating on the sea or have been washed ashore.
fugitive (n)	a person who has escaped from captivity or is in hiding.
gaily	in a cheerful or light-hearted way.
Gay (ad)	light-hearted and carefree.
haltingly (adj)	slow and hesitant, especially through lack of confidence; faltering.
hiccupy	have an attack of hiccups or a single hiccup.
inconsequential	not important or significant.
jagged (ad)	with rough, sharp points protruding.
nightmarish (n)	Like a frightening or unpleasant dream.
Pestered (v)	trouble or annoy (someone) with frequent or persistent requests or interruptions.
poignant	evoking a keen sense of sadness or regret.
poked	prod and stir (a fire) with a poker to make it burn more fiercely.
pungent	having a sharply strong taste or smell.
quilted	join together (layers of fabric or padding) with lines of stitching to form a bed covering, a warm garment, or for decorative effect.
rake (v)	draw together with a rake or similar implement.
scatter-brained (ad)	(of a person) disorganized and lacking in concentration.
Siamese cat (n)	a cat of a lightly built short-haired breed characterized by slanting blue eyes and typically pale fur with darker points.
smoldered	burn slowly with smoke but no flame.
smothering (v)	kill (someone) by covering their nose and mouth so that they suffocate; extinguish (a fire) by covering it.
smudge (n)	a smoky outdoor fire that is lit to keep off insects or protect plants against frost.
snapping	break suddenly and completely, typically with a sharp cracking sound.
snug (ad)	comfortable, warm, and cosy; well protected from the weather or cold.
splinters (n)	a small, thin, sharp piece of wood, glass, or similar material broken

	off from a larger piece.
Spook	a ghost.
squishing	make a soft squelching sound when walked on or in.
stacks	a large quantity of something.
surmount	overcome (a difficulty or obstacle).
Tucked(v)	push, fold, or turn (the edges or ends of something, especially a garment or bedclothes) so as to hide or secure them.
tumbled	rumple; disarrange.
waffles	a small crisp batter cake, baked in a waffle iron and eaten hot with butter or syrup.
windowsill (n)	a ledge or sill forming the bottom part of a window.

Reading Comprehension

Answer the following questions.

1. How is the theme of 'From Mother . . . With Love' a universal theme present in literature across all cultures?
2. Comment on the plot of the story 'From Mother . . . With Love'.
3. Identify the narrator or speaker of the story 'From Mother. . . With Love'.
4. Analyze and comment on the character of Minta?
5. What is the conflict in the story? How is it resolved?
6. Where does Minta's father take her to discuss her mother's illness?
7. Which approach would you have preferred — deception or honesty — if you had to deal with similar circumstances like Minta's mother? Give reasons for your choice.
8. How did the vitamin pills become the symbol of responsibility?
9. How did Minta change over the course of the story? Limit your answer to just five sentences.
10. Why was the blue chair significant? Explain.
11. Explain how Minta knows that her mother accepted death. Why is that knowledge comforting to her?

Writing Suggestions

Write down the character sketch of Minta.

Oral Communication

Working in pair

- Compare and contrast the characters of Minta's father and mother. Who do like the most? Justify with reasons.

Vocabulary and Grammar

Vocabulary

Look for the meaning of the following emotive words in dictionary. Find their antonyms in an authentic thesaurus. Now write the correct word for the emotions expressed in each statement.

lazy

vengeful

vain

snobbish

sympathetic

arrogant

ambitious

proud

1. There's no house in town better than mine. _____
2. I can't stand talking to poor people. _____
3. My son did really well in his exam. _____
4. Oh, my hair looks wonderful today. _____
5. I just don't want to get out of bed today. _____
6. I will own my own business within five years. _____
7. Sajida, I understand what you are going through. _____
8. I'll never forget what she did to me. _____

GRAMMAR

A. Choose one of the relative pronouns **who**, **which** or **whose** to fill in the blanks.

1. I talked to the girl _____ car had broken down in front of the shop.
2. Mr. Nizam, _____ is a taxi driver, lives on the corner.
3. I live in a house in Hayatabad _____ is in Peshawar.
4. This is the girl _____ comes from Spain.
5. That's Abrar, the boy _____ has just arrived at the airport.

6. Thank you very much for your e-mail _____ was very interesting.
7. The man, _____ father is a professor, forgot his umbrella.
8. The children _____ shouted in the street are not from our school.
9. The car, _____ driver is a young man, is from Ireland.
10. What did you do with the money _____ your mother lent you?

B. Underline the indefinite pronoun (or pronouns) in the following sentences. There are a total of 10 indefinite pronouns across these 9 sentences. Then use these pronouns in your own sentences.

1. Everybody enjoys cricket matches.
2. Does anybody have the time?
3. One student read while the others listen to him carefully.
4. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.
5. The secret was known by few.
6. No, the secret was known by many.
7. Calculus is too hard for some.
8. Surely you recognize somebody.
9. Is there anything that I can do?

Teacher's Guideline:

Explain and revise with the students the use of indefinite pronouns.