

# Christmas Storms and Sunshine

Short Story by Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell



**READING 5C** Compare and contrast the effects of different forms of narration across various genres of fiction. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell . . .

- was one of the most popular female novelists of her time.
- was close friends with fellow author Charlotte Brontë, whose biography she wrote.

## Meet the Author

### Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell 1810–1865

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell was a literary trailblazer. She dared to examine illegitimacy, sexual exploitation, and oppression of the poor—risky topics for the Victorian era. Her stories and novels anticipated modern psychological fiction, delving into the daily lives and the emotional and intellectual growth of women. They also chronicled the social ills of the time. Gaskell was a careful observer who wrote about poverty and poor wages, unsafe working conditions, low life expectancy, and exploitation experienced by the lower classes.

**Recreating Her Home** Gaskell's life was shaped by the death of her mother when Elizabeth was an infant. Her father sent her to live with a maternal aunt in the Cheshire village of Knutsford; she was raised by that aunt, whom she called “my more than mother.” In her popular novel *Cranford*, published in 1853, Gaskell recreated much of her life in Knutsford, with its leafy streets, gracious homes, and eccentric neighbors.

Gaskell moved to the city of Manchester when she married William Gaskell in 1832. He was a Unitarian minister, an intellectual, and a community leader. Like Gaskell's Unitarian father, he influenced her

beliefs in tolerance, justice, and the equal worth of the rich and the poor.

**Determined to Be Heard** The Victorian era was a time of strict moral standards that were often applied hypocritically, with different expectations of men and women. Gaskell's 1853 novel *Ruth* shocked readers, because it dealt sympathetically with a young unwed mother. The author was well aware that her treatment of this issue would provoke attacks. “An unfit subject for fiction is the thing to say about it,” she said, summing up her critics' objections. “I knew all this before, but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind about it.”

**Victorian Crusader** Throughout her career, Gaskell remained committed to raising the social awareness of her readers. The writer's era was rife with change, as the old English aristocracy declined and the roots of democracy began to take hold. Her novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South* both showed her support for Britain's liberal party, the Whigs. Her writings also demonstrated her support for legislation such as the Reform Bill of 1832, which granted voting rights to the middle class. Gaskell's last works, *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters*, cemented her reputation as a novelist and social historian.

Author Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML12-994





## LITERARY ANALYSIS: OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW

A story told from the **third-person point of view** features a narrator who is not a character in the story but an outside observer. In contrast to other types of narrators, (see pages 183, 1127, and 1199) some third-person narrators are **omniscient**, or all-knowing, and can reveal the thoughts of multiple characters. The third-person omniscient point of view was popular with Victorian authors, who used it not only to reveal their characters' thoughts but also to express opinions on those characters and their dilemmas. As you read the following story, consider how the point of view affects both what you learn about the characters and how you react to their behavior.

## READING SKILL: IDENTIFY MOOD

The **mood** of a literary work is the feeling or atmosphere a writer creates for the reader. Fiction writers can create mood through imagery, descriptive details, word choice, and setting. For example, a story set during the last inning of a tied baseball game may have an exciting, suspenseful mood. Sometimes the mood of a story will change as the plot progresses. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to record the elements Gaskell uses to create mood in her story, and note any changes in the mood.

Literary Element	Examples	Mood Created
Imagery/Descriptive Details	It was the day before Christmas; such a cold east wind! such an inky sky! such blue-black looks on people's faces... (lines 47-49)	bleak, not festive
Word Choice		
Setting		

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Gaskell depicts a heated conflict using the following words. Choose the word that best completes each sentence.

<b>WORD LIST</b>	affronted	bigoted	propensity
	assent	penitence	upbraiding

1. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ person fails to view others with an open mind.
2. Her \_\_\_\_\_ for singing led to a career in the spotlight.
3. The child received a harsh \_\_\_\_\_ for his bad behavior.
4. She calmly nodded her head in \_\_\_\_\_.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## What can break down PREJUDICE?

Grim examples of prejudice are everywhere. People avoid neighborhoods where the residents are different from them. Kids make fun of other kids who aren't of the same race, religion, or social class. Obese or older people are often overlooked for job promotions, and men earn higher salaries than women. How can we overcome such unfair preconceived judgments?

**DISCUSS** With a partner, talk about examples of prejudice like the ones listed above. Then, choose one example and come up with specific tactics for overcoming it. Share your strategies in a class discussion.





# CHRISTMAS STORMS AND SUNSHINE

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell

**BACKGROUND** The early Victorian era was a time of political reform, as the old aristocracy reluctantly gave way to a more democratic system. The Tories, a conservative political party that represented the interests of wealthy landowners, opposed the democratic reforms. They scorned the Whig party for supporting measures that gradually allowed the middle class to become a major force in British politics. Gaskell chronicled the clashes between the parties, as well as the manners, morals, and living conditions of Victorian society.

## Analyze Visuals ►

Describe the time and place depicted in this etching. What details give you this sense?

In the town of—(no matter where) there circulated two local newspapers (no matter when). Now the *Flying Post* was long-established and respectable—alias **bigoted** and Tory;<sup>1</sup> the *Examiner* was spirited and intelligent—alias newfangled and democratic. Every week these newspapers contained articles abusing each other, as cross and peppery as articles could be, and evidently the production of irritated minds, although they seemed to have one stereotyped commencement<sup>2</sup>—“Though the article appearing in our last week’s *Post* (or *Examiner*) is below contempt, yet we have been induced,” &c.<sup>3</sup> &c.; and every Saturday the Radical<sup>4</sup> shopkeepers shook hands together, and agreed that the *Post* was done for by the  
10 slashing, clever *Examiner*; while the more dignified Tories began by regretting that Johnson should think that low paper, only read by a few of the vulgar, worth wasting his wit upon; however, the *Examiner* was at its last gasp. **A**

**bigoted** (bĭg’ə-tĭd) *adj.*  
prejudiced and narrow-minded; intolerant

**A POINT OF VIEW**  
Consider what you learn about the two newspapers in lines 1–12. How do the narrator’s comments affect your impression of the papers?

1. **Tory** (tôr’ē): referring to Britain’s Conservative Party. Most British newspapers in Victorian times expressed the opinions of one political party or another.
2. **stereotyped commencement**: a beginning that was repeatedly used, without variation.
3. **&c.**: et cetera.
4. **Radical**: referring to members of Britain’s Whig Party who were especially insistent in their desire for reform.







It was not, though. It lived and flourished; at least it paid its way, as one of the heroes of my story could tell. He was chief compositor, or whatever title may be given to the headman of the mechanical part of a newspaper. He hardly confined himself to that department. Once or twice, unknown to the editor, when the manuscript had fallen short, he had filled up the vacant space by compositions of his own; announcements of a forthcoming crop of green peas in December; a grey thrush having been seen, or a white hare, or such interesting phenomena; invented for the occasion, I must confess; but what of that? His wife always knew when to expect a little specimen of her husband's literary talent by a peculiar cough, which served as prelude; and, judging from this encouraging sign, and the high-pitched and emphatic voice in which he read them, she was inclined to think, that an "Ode to an Early Rosebud," in the corner devoted to original poetry, and a letter in the correspondence department, signed "Pro Bono Publico,"<sup>5</sup> were her husband's writing, and to hold up her head accordingly.

I never could find out what it was that occasioned the Hodgsons to lodge in the same house as the Jenkinsons. Jenkins held the same office in the Tory Paper as Hodgson did in the *Examiner*, and, as I said before, I leave you to give it a name. But Jenkins had a proper sense of his position, and a proper reverence for all in authority, from the king down to the editor and sub-editor. He would as soon have thought of borrowing the king's crown for a nightcap, or the king's scepter for a walking-stick as he would have thought of filling up any spare corner with any production of his own; and I think it would have even added to his contempt of Hodgson (if that were possible), had he known of the "productions of his brain," as the latter fondly alluded<sup>6</sup> to the paragraphs he inserted, when speaking to his wife. **B**

Jenkins had his wife too. Wives were wanting<sup>7</sup> to finish the completeness of the quarrel which existed one memorable Christmas week, some dozen years ago, between the two neighbors, the two compositors. And with wives, it was a very pretty, a very complete quarrel. To make the opposing parties still more equal, still more well-matched, if the Hodgsons had a baby ("such a baby!—a poor, puny little thing"), Mrs. Jenkins had a cat ("such a cat! a great, nasty, miowling tom-cat, that was always stealing the milk put by for little Angel's supper"). And now, having matched Greek with Greek, I must proceed to the tug of war.<sup>8</sup> It was the day before Christmas; such a cold east wind! such an inky sky! such a blue-black look in people's faces, as they were driven out more than usual, to complete their purchases for the next day's festival. **C**

Before leaving home that morning, Jenkins had given some money to his wife to buy the next day's dinner.

"My dear, I wish for turkey and sausages. It may be a weakness, but I own I am partial to sausages. My deceased mother was. Such tastes are hereditary. As to the sweets—whether plum-pudding or mince-pies—I leave such considerations to

## **B POINT OF VIEW**

### **Omniscient narrators**

of the Victorian era are often described as more "intrusive" than contemporary narrators. Reread lines 27–37. Why might the narrator of this story be described as intrusive?

## **C IDENTIFY MOOD**

Reread lines 40–45. In setting up these two opposing families, what mood does Gaskell create? Cite **details** that help the author establish this mood.

5. "Pro Bono Publico" (prō bō'nō pūb'li-kō): a Latin phrase meaning "for the public good."

6. **allude:** (E-lldP) v. to refer to indirectly.

7. **wanting:** required; needed.

8. **having matched . . . tug of war:** a reference to the saying "When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war," meaning that when evenly matched opponents fight, the battle will be fierce.



you; I only beg you not to mind expense. Christmas comes but once a year.”

And again he called out from the bottom of the first flight of stairs, just close to the Hodgsons’ door (“such ostentatiousness,” as Mrs. Hodgson observed), “You will not forget the sausages, my dear!”

“I should have liked to have had something above common, Mary,” said Hodgson, as they too made their plans for the next day; “but I think roast beef  
60 must do for us. You see, love, we’ve a family.”

“Only one, Jem! I don’t want more than roast beef, though, I’m sure. Before I went to service,<sup>9</sup> mother and me would have thought roast beef a very fine dinner.”

“Well, let’s settle it, then, roast beef and a plum-pudding; and now, good-bye. Mind and take care of little Tom. I thought he was a bit hoarse this morning.”

And off he went to his work.

Now, it was a good while since Mrs. Jenkins and Mrs. Hodgson had spoken to each other, although they were quite as much in possession of the knowledge of events and opinions as though they did. Mary knew that Mrs. Jenkins despised  
70 her for not having a real lace cap, which Mrs. Jenkins had; and for having been a servant, which Mrs. Jenkins had not; and the little occasional pinchings<sup>10</sup> which the Hodgsons were obliged to resort to, to make both ends meet, would have been very patiently endured by Mary, if she had not winced under Mrs. Jenkins’s knowledge of such economy. But she had her revenge. She had a child, and Mrs. Jenkins had none. To have had a child, even such a puny baby as little Tom, Mrs. Jenkins would have worn commonest caps, and cleaned grates, and drudged her fingers to the bone. The great unspoken disappointment of her life soured her temper, and turned her thoughts inward, and made her morbid and selfish. **D**

“Hang that cat! he’s been stealing again! he’s gnawed the cold mutton in his  
80 nasty mouth till it’s not fit to set before a Christian; and I’ve nothing else for Jem’s dinner. But I’ll give it him now I’ve caught him, that I will!”

So saying, Mary Hodgson caught up her husband’s Sunday cane, and despite pussy’s cries and scratches, she gave him such a beating as she hoped might cure him of his thievish **propensities**; when, lo! and behold, Mrs. Jenkins stood at the door with a face of bitter wrath.

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, ma’am, to abuse a poor dumb animal, ma’am, as knows no better than to take food when he sees it, ma’am? He only follows the nature which God has given, ma’am; and it’s a pity your nature, ma’am, which I’ve heard is of the stingy saving species, does not make you shut your cupboard door a  
90 little closer. There is such a thing as law for brute animals. I’ll ask Mr. Jenkins, but I don’t think them Radicals has done away with that law yet, for all their Reform Bill,<sup>11</sup> ma’am. My poor precious love of a Tommy, is he hurt? and is his leg broke for taking a mouthful of scraps, as most people would give away to a beggar—if

#### **D POINT OF VIEW**

Reread lines 67–78. What does the narrator reveal about the **motivation** of each of these characters? How might this passage be different if the narrator were not **omniscient**?

**propensity** (prə-pĕn’sī-tē)  
*n.* a likelihood to do or think something; tendency; inclination

9. **went to service**: took employment as a servant.

10. **pinchings**: cost-cutting measures.

11. **Reform Bill**: one of a series of bills in 19th-century England, generally supported by Whigs but not Tories, that extended voting rights to more men.





*Cat Looks Out of Window* from *Aunt Louisa's Welcome Gift*  
by H. W. Petherick, 1860. Mary Evans Picture Library.

he'd take 'em!" wound up Mrs. Jenkins, casting a contemptuous look on the remnant of a scrag end of mutton.

Mary felt very angry and very guilty. For she really pitied the poor limping animal as he crept up to his mistress, and there lay down to bemoan himself; she wished she had not beaten him so hard, for it certainly was her own careless way of never shutting the cupboard-door that had tempted him to his fault. But the  
 100 sneer at her little bit of mutton turned her **penitence** to fresh wrath, and she shut the door in Mrs. Jenkins's face, as she stood caressing her cat in the lobby, with such a bang, that it wakened little Tom, and he began to cry.

**penitence** (pěn'Y-təns)  
*n.* feeling regret for a wrongful act and wanting to atone for it

Everything was to go wrong with Mary today. Now baby was awake, who was to take her husband's dinner to the office? She took the child in her arms and tried to hush him off to sleep again, and as she sung she cried, she could hardly tell why,—a sort of reaction from her violent angry feelings. She wished she had never beaten the poor cat; she wondered if his leg was really broken. What would her mother say if she knew how cross and cruel her little Mary was getting? If she should live to beat her child in one of her angry fits?

110 It was of no use lullabying while she sobbed so; it must be given up, and she must just carry her baby in her arms, and take him with her to the office, for it was long past dinner-time. So she pared the mutton carefully, although by so



doing she reduced the meat to an infinitesimal <sup>12</sup> quantity, and taking the baked potatoes out of the oven, she popped them piping hot into her basket, with the etceteras of plate, butter, salt, and knife and fork.

It was, indeed, a bitter wind. She bent against it as she ran, and the flakes of snow were sharp and cutting as ice. Baby cried all the way, though she cuddled him up in her shawl. Then her husband had made his appetite up for a potato pie, and (literary man as he was) his body got so much the better of his mind, that he  
120 looked rather black at the cold mutton. Mary had no appetite for her own dinner when she arrived at home again. So, after she had tried to feed baby, and he had fretfully refused to take his bread and milk, she laid him down as usual on his quilt, surrounded by playthings, while she sided away, and chopped suet for the next day's pudding. Early in the afternoon a parcel came, done up first in brown paper, then in such a white, grass-bleached, sweet-smelling towel, and a note from her dear, dear mother; in which quaint writing she endeavored to tell her daughter that she was not forgotten at Christmas time; but that, learning that Farmer Burton was killing his pig, she had made interest for some of his famous pork, out of which she had manufactured some sausages, and flavored them just as Mary  
130 used to like when she lived at home.

"Dear, dear mother!" said Mary to herself. "There never was any one like her for remembering other folk. What rare sausages she used to make! Home things have a smack with 'em no bought things can ever have. Set them up with their sausages! I've a notion if Mrs. Jenkins had ever tasted mother's she'd have no fancy for them townmade things Fanny took in just now."

And so she went on thinking about home, till the smiles and the dimples came out again at the remembrance of that pretty cottage, which would look green even now in the depth of winter, with its pyracanthus,<sup>13</sup> and its holly-bushes, and the great Portugal laurel that was her mother's pride. And the back path through the  
140 orchard to Farmer Burton's, how well she remembered it! The bushels of unripe apples she had picked up there and distributed among his pigs, till he had scolded her for giving them so much green trash!

She was interrupted—her baby (I call him a baby, because his father and mother did, and because he was so little of his age, but I rather think he was eighteen months old,) had fallen asleep some time before among his playthings; an uneasy, restless sleep; but of which Mary had been thankful, as his morning's nap had been too short, and as she was so busy. But now he began to make such a strange crowing noise, just like a chair drawn heavily and gratingly along a kitchen floor! His eyes were open, but expressive of nothing but pain.

150 "Mother's darling!" said Mary, in terror, lifting him up. "Baby, try not to make that noise. Hush, hush, darling; what hurts him?" But the noise came worse and worse.

"Fanny! Fanny!" Mary called in mortal fright, for her baby was almost black with his gasping breath, and she had no one to ask for aid or sympathy but her landlady's daughter, a little girl of twelve or thirteen, who attended to the house

### Language Coach

#### Multiple Meanings

The word *fancy* can mean (1) decorated, not plain; (2) a liking or preference; (3) to like; or (4) to imagine. Meanings 2-4 are mainly British. What does *fancy* mean in line 134? Create a new sentence using *fancy* in a different way.

12. **infinitesimal**: (ɪnˈfɪn-ɪ-tēs-ə-məl) adj. extremely small; tiny

13. **pyracanthus** (pɪˈrə-kənˈθəs): a pyracantha—a thorny evergreen shrub.



in her mother's absence, as daily cook in gentlemen's families. Fanny was more especially considered the attendant of the upstairs lodgers (who paid for the use of the kitchen, "for Jenkins could not abide the smell of meat cooking"), but just now she was fortunately sitting at her afternoon's work of darning stockings, and  
160 hearing Mrs. Hodgson's cry of terror, she ran to her sitting-room, and understood the case at a glance.

"He's got the croup!<sup>14</sup> O Mrs. Hodgson, he'll die as sure as fate. Little brother had it, and he died in no time. The doctor said he could do nothing for him—it had gone too far. He said if we'd put him in a warm bath at first, it might have saved him; but, bless you! he was never half so bad as your baby." Unconsciously there mingled in her statement some of a child's love of producing an effect; but the increasing danger was clear enough.

"Oh, my baby! my baby! Oh, love, love! don't look so ill! I cannot bear it. And my fire so low! There, I was thinking of home, and picking currants, and never  
170 minding the fire. O Fanny! what is the fire like in the kitchen? Speak."

"Mother told me to screw it up, and throw some slack<sup>15</sup> on as soon as Mrs. Jenkins had done with it, and so I did. It's very low and black. But, oh, Mrs. Hodgson! let me run for the doctor—I cannot abear to hear him, it's so like little brother."

Through her streaming tears Mary motioned her to go; and trembling, sinking, sick at heart, she laid her boy in his cradle, and ran to fill her kettle. **E**

Mrs. Jenkins, having cooked her husband's snug little dinner, to which he came home; having told him her story of pussy's beating, at which he was justly and dignifiedly (?) indignant, saying it was all of a piece with that abusive *Examiner*;  
180 having received the sausages, and turkey, and mince pies, which her husband had ordered; and cleaned up the room, and prepared everything for tea, and coaxed and duly bemoaned her cat (who had pretty nearly forgotten his beating, but very much enjoyed the petting); having done all these and many other things, Mrs. Jenkins sat down to get up the real lace cap. Every thread was pulled out separately, and carefully stretched: when—what was that? Outside, in the street, a chorus of piping children's voices sang the old carol she had heard a hundred times in the days of her youth—

*As Joseph was a walking he heard an angel sing,  
"This night shall be born our heavenly King.  
190 He neither shall be born in housen nor in hall,  
Nor in the place of Paradise, but in an ox's stall.  
He neither shall be clothed in purple nor in pall,<sup>16</sup>  
But all in fair linen, as were babies all:  
He neither shall be rocked in silver nor in gold,  
But in a wooden cradle that rocks on the mould," &c.<sup>17</sup>*

#### **E IDENTIFY MOOD**

How would you describe the mood at this point in the story? Reread lines 150–176, identifying the descriptive **details** and **word choices** that allow Gaskell to build the mood to a crescendo.

14. **croup** (krōōp): a respiratory disease in children, marked by difficulty in breathing and a sharp cough.

15. **slack**: fragments of coal.

16. **pall** (pól): fine or rich cloth.

17. **mould**: soil; ground.



She got up and went to the window. There, below, stood the group of black little figures, relieved<sup>18</sup> against the snow, which now enveloped everything. “For old sake’s sake,” as she phrased it, she counted out a halfpenny apiece for the singers, out of the copper bag,<sup>19</sup> and threw them down below.

200 The room had become chilly while she had been counting out and throwing down her money, so she stirred her already glowing fire, and sat down right before it—but not to stretch her lace; like Mary Hodgson, she began to think over long past days, on softening remembrances of the dead and gone, on words long forgotten, on holy stories heard at her mother’s knee.

“I cannot think what’s come over me tonight,” said she, half aloud, recovering herself by the sound of her own voice from her train of thought—“My head goes wandering on them old times. I’m sure more texts<sup>20</sup> have come into my head with thinking on my mother within this last half-hour, than I’ve thought on for years and years. I hope I’m not going to die. Folks says, thinking too much on the dead  
210 betokens we’re going to join ’em; I should be loth to go just yet—such a fine turkey as we’ve got for dinner tomorrow too!”

Knock, knock, knock, at the door, as fast as knuckles could go. And then, as if the comer could not wait, the door was opened, and Mary Hodgson stood there as white as death.

“Mrs. Jenkins!—oh, your kettle is boiling, thank God! Let me have the water for my baby, for the love of God! He’s got croup, and is dying!”

Mrs. Jenkins turned on her chair with a wooden, inflexible look on her face, that (between ourselves) her husband knew and dreaded for all his pompous dignity.

220 “I’m sorry I can’t oblige you, ma’am; my kettle is wanted for my husband’s tea. Don’t be afeared, Tommy, Mrs. Hodgson won’t venture to intrude herself where she’s not desired. You’d better send for the doctor, ma’am, instead of wasting your time in wringing your hands, ma’am—my kettle is engaged.”

Mary clasped her hands together with passionate force, but spoke no word of entreaty to that wooden face—that sharp, determined voice; but, as she turned away, she prayed for strength to bear the coming trial, and strength to forgive Mrs. Jenkins.

Mrs. Jenkins watched her go away meekly, as one who has no hope, and then she turned upon herself as sharply as she ever did on any one else.

230 “What a brute I am, Lord forgive me! What’s my husband’s tea to a baby’s life? In croup, too, where time is everything. You crabbed old vixen, you!—any one may know you never had a child!”

She was downstairs (kettle in hand) before she had finished her self-**upbraiding**; and when in Mrs. Hodgson’s room, she rejected all thanks (Mary had not the voice for many words), saying, stiffly, “I do it for the poor baby’s sake, ma’am, hoping he may live to have mercy to poor dumb beasts, if he does forget to lock his cupboards.” **F**

## Language Coach

### Meaning of Idioms

**Idioms** are phrases that have a special meaning apart from the literal sense of the words. The phrase *train of thought* (line 206) is an example of an idiom. How do lines 202-204 help you understand its meaning?

**upbraiding** (ŭp-brād’ĭng)  
*n.* scolding **upbraid** *v.*

### **F** POINT OF VIEW

What do lines 223–232 reveal about Mary and Mrs. Jenkins that they don’t say directly to one another?

18. **relieved**: set off by contrast.

19. **copper bag**: a bag in which Mrs. Jenkins kept coins.

20. **texts**: passages from the Bible.





*This Little Piggy Went* from *Songs for the Nursery*, 1818. Mary Evans Picture Library.

But she did everything, and more than Mary, with her young inexperience, could have thought of. She prepared the warm bath, and tried it with her husband's own thermometer (Mr. Jenkins was as punctual as clockwork in noting  
240 down the temperature of every day). She let his mother place her baby in the tub, still preserving the same rigid, **affronted** aspect, and then she went upstairs without a word. Mary longed to ask her to stay, but dared not; though, when she left the room, the tears chased each other down her cheeks faster than ever. Poor young mother! how she counted the minutes till the doctor should come. But, before he came, down again stalked Mrs. Jenkins, with something in her hand.

**affronted** (ə-frŭnt'ĭd)  
*adj.* insulted; offended  
**affront** *v.*

"I've seen many of these croup-fits, which, I take it, you've not, ma'am. Mustard plasters<sup>21</sup> is very sovereign,<sup>22</sup> put on the throat; I've been up and made one, ma'am, and, by your leave, I'll put it on the poor little fellow."

250 Mary could not speak, but she signed her grateful **assent**.

**assent** (ə-sĕnt') *n.*  
acceptance of an opinion  
or a proposal; agreement

It began to smart while they still kept silence; and he looked up to his mother as if seeking courage from her looks to bear the stinging pain; but she was softly crying to see him suffer, and her want of courage reacted upon him, and he began to sob aloud. Instantly Mrs. Jenkins's apron was up, hiding her face: "Peep-bo, baby," said she, as merrily as she could. His little face brightened, and his mother having once got the cue, the two women kept the little fellow amused, until his plaster had taken effect.

21. **mustard plasters:** applications of a paste made of powdered mustard, water, and vinegar, used to relieve inflammation.

22. **sovereign** (sŏv'ər-ĭn): effective.



“He’s better—oh, Mrs. Jenkins, look at his eyes! how different! And he breathes quite softly”—

260 As Mary spoke thus, the doctor entered. He examined his patient. Baby was really better.

“It has been a sharp attack, but the remedies you have applied have been worth all the Pharmacopoeia<sup>23</sup> an hour later.—I shall send a powder,” &c. &c.

Mrs. Jenkins stayed to hear this opinion; and (her heart wonderfully more easy) was going to leave the room, when Mary seized her hand and kissed it; she could not speak her gratitude.

Mrs. Jenkins looked affronted and awkward, and as if she must go upstairs and wash her hand directly.

But, in spite of these sour looks, she came softly down an hour or so afterwards  
270 to see how baby was.

The little gentleman slept well after the fright he had given his friends; and on Christmas morning, when Mary awoke and looked at the sweet little pale face lying on her arm, she could hardly realize the danger he had been in.

When she came down (later than usual), she found the household in a commotion. What do you think had happened? Why, pussy had been traitor to his best friend, and eaten up some of Mr. Jenkins’s own especial sausages; and gnawed and tumbled the rest so, that they were not fit to be eaten! There were no bounds to that cat’s appetite! he would have eaten his own father if he had been tender enough. And now Mrs. Jenkins stormed and cried—“Hang the cat!”

280 Christmas Day, too! and all the shops shut! “What was turkey without sausages?” gruffly asked Mr. Jenkins.

“O Jem!” whispered Mary, “hearken what a piece of work he’s making about sausages—I should like to take Mrs. Jenkins up some of mother’s; they’re twice as good as bought sausages.”

“I see no objection, my dear. Sausages do not involve intimacies, else his politics are what I can no ways respect.”

“But, oh, Jem, if you had seen her last night about baby! I’m sure she may scold me forever, and I’ll not answer. I’d even make her cat welcome to the sausages.”

The tears gathered to Mary’s eyes as she kissed her boy.

290 “Better take ’em upstairs, my dear, and give them to the cat’s mistress.” And Jem chuckled at his saying.

Mary put them on a plate, but still she loitered.

“What must I say, Jem? I never know.”

“Say—I hope you’ll accept of these sausages, as my mother—no, that’s not grammar;—say what comes uppermost, Mary, it will be sure to be right.”

So Mary carried them upstairs and knocked at the door; and when told to “come in,” she looked very red, but went up to Mrs. Jenkins, saying, “Please take these. Mother made them.” And was away before an answer could be given.

Just as Hodgson was ready to go to church, Mrs. Jenkins came downstairs, and  
300 called Fanny. In a minute, the latter entered the Hodgsons’ room, and delivered

**G GRAMMAR AND STYLE**

Reread lines 274–279, noting the narrator’s use of the **second-person pronoun** *you*. This technique, along with the narrator’s habit of using parenthetical asides to convey extra information, allows Gaskell to establish a conversational **voice** in this story.

23. **all the Pharmacopoeia** (fär’mə-kə-pē’ə): all the medicinal drugs listed in the standard reference work on the subject.



Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins's compliments, and they would be particular glad if Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson would eat their dinner with them.

"And carry baby upstairs in a shawl, be sure," added Mrs. Jenkins's voice in the passage, close to the door, whither she had followed her messenger. There was no discussing the matter, with the certainty of every word being overheard.

Mary looked anxiously at her husband. She remembered his saying he did not approve of Mr. Jenkins's politics.

"Do you think it would do for baby?" asked he.

"Oh, yes," answered she eagerly; "I would wrap him up so warm."

310 "And I've got our room up to sixty-five already, for all it's so frosty," added the voice outside.

Now, how do you think they settled the matter? The very best way in the world. Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins came down into the Hodgsons' room and dined there. Turkey at the top, roast beef at the bottom, sausages at one side, potatoes at the other. Second course, plum pudding at the top, and mince pies at the bottom.

And after dinner, Mrs. Jenkins would have baby on her knee, and he seemed quite to take to her; she declared he was admiring the real lace on her cap, but Mary thought (though she did not say so) that he was pleased by her kind looks and coaxing words. Then he was wrapped up and carried carefully upstairs to tea, 320 in Mrs. Jenkins's room. And after tea, Mrs. Jenkins, and Mary, and her husband, found out each other's mutual liking for music, and sat singing old glees and catches,<sup>24</sup> till I don't know what o'clock, without one word of politics or newspapers.

Before they parted, Mary had coaxed pussy on to her knee; for Mrs. Jenkins would not part with baby, who was sleeping on her lap.

"When you're busy bring him to me. Do, now, it will be a real favor. I know you must have a deal to do, with another coming; let him come up to me. I'll take the greatest of cares of him; pretty darling, how sweet he looks when he's asleep!" H


When the couples were once more alone, the husbands unburdened their minds to their wives.

330 Mr. Jenkins said to his— "Do you know, Burgess tried to make me believe Hodgson was such a fool as to put paragraphs into the *Examiner* now and then; but I see he knows his place, and has got too much sense to do any such thing."

Hodgson said— "Mary, love, I almost fancy from Jenkins's way of speaking (so much civiler than I expected), he guesses I wrote that 'Pro Bono' and the 'Rosebud,'—at any rate, I've no objection to your naming it, if the subject should come uppermost; I should like him to know I'm a literary man."

Well! I've ended my tale; I hope you don't think it too long; but, before I go, just let me say one thing.

340 If any of you have any quarrels, or misunderstandings, or coolnesses, or cold shoulders, or shynesses, or tiffs, or miffs, or huffs, with anyone else, just make friends before Christmas,—you will be so much merrier if you do.

I ask it of you for the sake of that old angelic song, heard so many years ago by the shepherds, keeping watch by night, on Bethlehem Heights. <sup>25</sup> 

#### H IDENTIFY MOOD

Describe how the mood of this scene differs from the passages describing Mary's desperate attempts to save her baby. What literary elements work to achieve this mood?

24. **glees and catches:** unaccompanied part or round songs for several voices.

25. **the shepherds . . . Heights:** the shepherds who visited the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.



## Comprehension

1. **Recall** What do Mr. Hodgson and Mr. Jenkins do for a living?
2. **Clarify** Why does Mary Hodgson beat Mrs. Jenkins's cat?
3. **Summarize** How does Mrs. Jenkins's attitude toward baby Tom change over the course of the story?



**READING 5C** Compare and contrast the effects of different forms of narration across various genres of fiction. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

## Literary Analysis

4. **Draw Conclusions** Explain why the two families are antagonistic toward each other at the beginning of the story. What causes them to overcome their prejudice against each other? Support your conclusion with evidence.
5. **Make Predictions** In your opinion, is the truce between the two families likely to last? Explain why or why not, citing evidence from the story to support your answer.
6. **Identify Mood** Review the chart you filled in as you read. What shifts in mood occur as the story progresses? Citing specific examples, describe the literary elements Gaskell employs to create a distinct mood.
7. **Analyze Realism** Victorian literature is known for its realism—the careful and detailed presentation of everyday life. In addition to depicting reality, Victorian authors like Gaskell had another purpose: they used their writing to expose the problems plaguing their society. What aspects of Victorian society is Gaskell commenting on in this story? Support your answer with details, descriptions, and dialogue from the text.
8. **Evaluate Third-Person Omniscient Point of View** The word *omniscient* comes from the Latin words *omnis*, which means “all,” and *scientia*, which means “knowledge.” Identify at least two passages in the story that show that this narrator is omniscient. What insights provided by the narrator particularly affected you? Describe how the story might have been different if it had been told in the third-person limited point of view.

## Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** Critics have praised Gaskell's “refusal to give easy answers to social and spiritual dilemmas.” Do you think this comment applies to the problems Gaskell explores in this story? Cite evidence to support your opinion.

### *What can break down* **PREJUDICE?**

How can focusing on similarities rather than differences help us overcome prejudices or other negative preconceptions we may have about others?



## Vocabulary in Context

### ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Use your knowledge of the boldface vocabulary words to indicate whether each statement is true or false.

1. A **bigoted** person often has a closed mind to new ideas.
2. A liar is someone with a **propensity** for honesty.
3. Prayer and good deeds are ways of showing **penitence**.
4. Most students welcome an **upbraiding** from the principal.
5. An **affronted** person usually smiles with joy.
6. Yes is a word of **assent**.

#### WORD LIST

affronted  
assent  
bigoted  
penitence  
propensity  
upbraiding

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• analyze • dominate • impact • resource • scheme

Instead of trying to **scheme** against and **dominate** each other, the neighbors in Gaskell's story overcome their differences through compassion. In a small group, discuss situations in which you or someone you know made negative assumptions about another person, but came to see him or her in a more positive light. Use at least one additional Academic Vocabulary word in your discussion.

### VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH

The English language has existed since Germanic tribes invaded the British Isles in the fifth century, and many factors have influenced its development. Many Old Norse words were absorbed into English as the Vikings began to invade in the eighth century. The Old Norse verb *hróþja*, meaning "to cry hoarsely," became *croup* in Scottish dialect. Along the way, a Scottish doctor coined the term *croup* as a noun to describe the childhood cough that afflicts many babies, including Mrs. Hodgson's. This is an example of how both **foreign languages** and **science and technology** have influenced the development of English. To learn more about the development of English, consult a history of the language.

**PRACTICE** Each of the following quotations from Gaskell's story contains a boldface word. Explain whether we owe each word mainly to advances in science or technology or to the influence of immigration.

1. "He was chief **compositor**, or whatever title may be given to the headman of the mechanical part of a newspaper."
2. "I am partial to sausages. My deceased mother was. Such tastes are **hereditary**."
3. "... she **endeavored** to tell her daughter that she was not forgotten at Christmas time..."
4. "... he's gnawed the cold **mutton** in his nasty mouth ...!"
5. "She prepared the bath and tried it with her husband's own **thermometer**."



**READING 1D** Analyze and explain how the English language has developed and been influenced by other languages. **1E** Use histories of language (printed or electronic) as needed.

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## Conventions in Writing

### ◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Establish Voice

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 1005. Part of what makes this story distinctive is Gaskell’s **voice**—her unique style of expression that allows you to “hear” a human personality behind the words you read. Gaskell uses a conversational style that matches the gossipy nature of her characters. She establishes this voice through the narrator, who uses the **second-person pronoun** *you* to address the reader directly. The narrator also makes parenthetical asides to the reader that convey additional information and comment on the characters’ behavior. Notice how, in this parenthetical aside, the narrator uses the phrase “between ourselves,” addressing the reader directly as though speaking to a friend:

*Mrs. Jenkins turned on her chair with a wooden, inflexible look on her face, that (between ourselves) her husband knew and dreaded for all his pompous dignity.*  
(lines 217–219)

**PRACTICE** The following paragraph is a sample response to the writing prompt. Rewrite the paragraph, adapting it to mimic Gaskell’s voice. Be sure to add direct comments to the reader, as well as parenthetical asides that seem to convey inside information about the characters.

*Jake’s parents and Will’s mother were best friends, and the boys had grown up together. They spent more time with one another than many siblings do, which only made them despise each other more. Forced by their parents to think of each other as “friends,” the two boys had been fighting as long as they could remember.*

### READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of “Christmas Storms and Sunshine” by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your story.

#### WRITING PROMPT

**WRITE A STORY** Omniscient narrators—particularly “intrusive” ones like that of “Christmas Storms and Sunshine”—were more common in the literature of the Victorian era than they are in contemporary writing. Conflicts between neighbors, however, are still at the heart of many modern stories. Using “Christmas Storms and Sunshine” as a model, write a **one- to three-page story** about modern neighbors wrapped in a compelling conflict. Use an intrusive third-person omniscient narrator similar to Gaskell’s to tell your story.

#### REVISING TIPS

- Introduce dynamic characters, a vivid setting, and a fresh conflict to grab readers’ attention.
- Employ a third-person omniscient narrator who reveals multiple characters’ thoughts and who comments on the story’s events.
- Have your narrator address the audience directly, using the second-person pronoun *you*.



**WRITING 14A** Write an engaging story. **ORAL AND WRITTEN CONVENTIONS 17** Understand the functions of and use the conventions of academic language in speaking and writing.

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