

Excerpt from: 5 Shorts



Five Really
Short Stories

Five Really
Cool Reading Guides

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Five Shorts: Five Really Short Stories, Five Really Cool Reading Guides

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The short stories in this work are fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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What's in 5 Short s?

Why Reading Guides? (4)

A note about how to use the included reading guides.

A Second Opinion (5)

Whoever heard of an Asian kid who couldn't pass the state high school achievement test? Well, Crystal La isn't exactly Asian, and she didn't exactly fail the exam. So why is she enrolled in Achievement Improvement class.

The Price of Freedom (8)

Nicholas never thought twice about the Pledge of Allegiance. His father's return from the war, however, changed everything.

Excerpt from *Boaz Brown*(12)

When LaShondra is forced to tutor a boy from church, she learns a valuable life lesson.

The Untitled Story (16)

DeMarcus Polk recalls life without his mother, who left seven years ago to pursue her Hollywood dreams.

Two Sides to Every Story (19)

There are two sides to every story. Read both accounts of a crazy romance gone wrong.

Why Reading Guides?

*“If we simply assign reading instead of teaching students how to read,
we’ll get poor reading.”*

-Kelly Gallagher, 2004

All stories include a Reading Guide, which consists of before-, during-, and after-reading strategies. These strategies can be modified and used with other readings. Feel free to add your own favorite strategies or adapt the ones provided so that your students can get the most out of their reading. A few notes to help you along the way:

- Don’t feel pressured to introduce, read, and wrap-up a story in one class setting.
- Your goal is to get your students into the habit of metacognition; thinking about what they’re thinking as they read. This takes time, but it certainly pays off in the end.
- Poor readers don’t know that good readers do things in their heads to *make* text make sense because mental processes are invisible (Tovani, 2000). By giving students ideas about what to do before reading, during reading, and after reading, we explicate the reading process so that it is no longer a mystery.

Gallagher, Kelly. 2004. *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse.

Tovani, Cris. 2000. *I Read It But I Don’t Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse.

5 Short s

Reading Guide – “The Untitled Story”

Before Reading

- Preview vocabulary (suggestions – coursing, fonder, available, persuade, mounted, wafted). The Longman Dictionary provides student-friendly definitions for the words you choose to preview (<http://www.ldoceonline.com/>).
- Inquiry Training*
 - Teacher must have already read the story to facilitate this activity.
 - Teacher tells students that they are going to read something, but in order to get an idea of what they’re going to read, the students must ask closed questions (which can be answered with “yes” or “no”) to formulate a prediction.
 - Students ask closed questions to arrive at the plot. (Examples: Is it fiction? Is the main character a boy? Does it take place in a school? Non-Examples: How old is the main character? Where do they live?) Encourage students to ask questions that flesh out the characters, setting, and conflict.
 - Teaching Note: You may wish to ask one person to record the “yes” responses and one to record the “no” responses on a T-chart that everyone can see.
 - After five minutes or so, have students work with a partner to create a prediction paragraph.

During Reading

Talking Points – Plan to read this story out loud (either teacher reads or student take turns reading). Stop and discuss specific questions at certain points with the students.

- After paragraph 5: 1) Do you get along with the people in your household? 2) How would you describe the relationship between DeMarcus and Ronald?
- After paragraph 14: 1) What’s more important – money or relationships? 2) What do you think *really* happened with DeMarcus’s mother?
- After paragraph 25: 1) Has your family ever gone through a change? 2) Do you think Mr. Polk made the right decision for his sons?
- After paragraph 35: 1) Have you ever cared about something/someone more than you cared about money? 2) Was Mrs. Polk’s success worth what it cost her family?

After Reading

- Discussion – Ask students what title they would give to the story and why? Students must use evidence from the story to support their titles.
- Writing activity – Write the mother’s side of this story. What would she title her version?

* Adapted from *Models of Teaching* by Joyce, B., Weil, M., Showers, B.

The Untitled Story

1 DeMarcus Polk turned over on his stomach and buried his face in a pillow to block out the sunlight spilling through the slats. Maybe he should get one of those eye-covering things that he'd seen people put on before going to bed. No, on second thought, he'd better not. He'd only seen women wearing those things. If his older brother, Ronald, came in and saw DeMarcus wearing a satin mask, he'd never be able to live it down.

2 It was bad enough that Ronald teased him about college. "You ain't gon' get no good job when you finish, not in this economy. And you ain't goin' to college, so what's the point?" Ronald always added a nasty shove to DeMarcus's head when he gave such sound advice.

3 DeMarcus pushed his brother's hand away. "I am going - community college first, then a university."

4 "Whatever. I'll be glad when you finish school 'cause I'm tired of raising you." Ronald made yet another excuse for why he hadn't done much with his life since finishing high school.

5 More and more, DeMarcus found himself avoiding Ronald. Ever since Ronald came back from his trip to California to see their mother, Ronald had changed. He was angrier, meaner. Not that Ronald had ever been accused of being nice before California, but he was definitely mad about something more than the, "Momma ain't the same," he would admit to.

6 As he continued lying in bed, DeMarcus tried to block out the hurtful memories coursing through his mind with fonder ones. Before his parents' divorce, things were better. He and Ronald used to go to karate classes, have birthday parties, and take trips with the church. His mother would make cupcakes for his class's Christmas celebration and ask to see his report card the very day it was issued.

7 His father worked two jobs – full-time at the brewery and part-time at a nursing home – so that his mom could stay home with DeMarcus and Ronald. It was only after DeMarcus entered kindergarten that his father allowed his mother to work a few hours during the day. "I want the best for my boys," he would say. "That means at least one parent available to them at all times."

8 DeMarcus believed that his father still wanted the best for them, but the best was far beyond his father's reach now. Survival was the only thing he could provide for them after his mother's leaving and the lay-off.

9 Dad had to make some tough choices. DeMarcus could never forget the day he sat them down, at ages ten and twelve, to inform them that life as they knew it would never be the same. "Boys, you know I've always tried to do right by you and your momma."

10 DeMarcus's father paused and bit his lower lip to stop the trembling. DeMarcus had never seen his father so anguished. He wondered what was wrong. Was his father sick? Was his mother dead? Were they moving to California, where his mother was taking a class on film?

11 "What is it, Dad?" Ronald had asked.

12 "Your mother...has decided not to come back home."

13 DeMarcus's young mind couldn't make sense of this news. "Did somebody kidnap her?"

14 "Oh no, DeMarcus, your mother is okay. She has...found someone else who is her...friend...and she would like to...stay in California with...that person."

15 Their father cleared his throat. “So, here’s the plan. If I can’t find another full-time job that pays what I was making at the brewery, I’ll have to find two part-time jobs to make up for it.”

16 He pointed at Ronald first. “You’re in charge. You’ll clean the bathrooms, take care of the laundry, and make hot dogs on Tuesday and Friday nights.”

17 “I gotta do laundry and cook!” Ronald protested.

18 “Yes, you do,” Mr. Polk confirmed with an authoritative edge in his voice.

19 Ronald folded his arms and pressed his back into the sofa. “That’s girl stuff.”

20 “Well, there are no girls around here anymore. It’s just us men from now on.”

21 DeMarcus’s father focused on his younger son now. “You do the vacuuming, get the mail every day, and make sandwiches on Mondays and Thursdays. I’ll take care of cooking on Wednesdays and weekends if I can – and we all have to clean up after ourselves. No more leaving your socks and shoes everywhere.

22 “I won’t be here to make sure you boys follow all the rules, but you do know what’s expected of you.”

23 And just like that, their family changed.

24 DeMarcus and Ronald spoke to their mother once in a while, but she never answered their questions, never said she was coming back. All she ever talked about was movies. “DeMarcus, a major producer is looking at my screenplay, honey!” On an on she went, trying to **persuade** him that this *next* screenplay would be the one to make her famous, make the grief worth it. “I’ll fly you out to California for the red carpet screening!”

25 In all her seven years in California, none of her big “projects” ever **mounted** to anything. Seven years of nothing but Ronald’s bullying, his father’s constant working, and what DeMarcus now believed was his mother’s selfish dream-chasing.

26 The smell of bacon **wafted** through the apartment. Saturday. As promised, DeMarcus’s father took care of food on the weekends when he wasn’t working. Try as he might, DeMarcus couldn’t resist fresh, crispy bacon which would probably be served with Belgian waffles and hot syrup.

27 He pulled the comforter off his body and headed toward the kitchen where his brother and father were just sitting down to eat. It was the first time in five days the three of them could relax together.

28 “Morning.”

29 “Hey, Pop.”

30 DeMarcus nodded at Ronald just as the doorbell rang. “I’ll get it.”

31 DeMarcus opened the door but didn’t see anyone. He looked down and saw a large UPS Express envelope lying at his feet. Perhaps it was a letter from a college – something he wouldn’t share with Ronald.

32 He tore through the packaging and pulled out a flyer. A movie flyer. *Dangerous Divas*, starring Jamie Foxx and Sanaa Lathan, coming to theaters June 15. And there, circled in a black marker, was the big news – *Screenplay by Donna Polk* – with a note scribble in the margin: *I finally made it! -Mom*

33 DeMarcus tore the flyer to pieces and threw them into the wind.

34 He rejoined his father and brother at the table, grabbed a fork, and slid a waffle onto his plate.

35 When his father inquired, DeMarcus replied, “It was nothin’ - somebody trying to sell us on somethin’.”

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