

Salvador Late or Early by Sandra Cisneros

Salvador with eyes the color of caterpillar, Salvador of the crooked hair and crooked teeth, Salvador whose name the teacher cannot remember, is a boy who is no one's friend, runs along somewhere in that vague direction where homes are the color of bad weather, lives behind a raw wood doorway, shakes the sleepy brothers awake, ties their shoes, combs their hair with water, feeds them milk and cornflakes from a tin cup in the dim dark of the morning.

Salvador, late or early, sooner or later arrives with the string of younger brothers ready. Helps his mama, who is busy with the business of the baby. Tugs the arms of Cecilio, Arturito, makes them hurry, because today, like yesterday, Arturito has dropped the cigar box of crayons, has let go the hundred little fingers of red, green, yellow, blue, and nub of black sticks that tumble and spill over and beyond the asphalt puddles until the crossing-guard lady holds back the blur of traffic for Salvador to collect them again.

Salvador inside that wrinkled shirt, inside the throat that must clear itself and apologize each time it speaks, inside that forty-pound body of boy with its geography of scars, its history of hurt, limbs stuffed with feathers and rags, in what part of the eyes, in what part of the heart, in that cage of the chest where something throbs with both fists and knows only what Salvador knows, inside that body too small to contain the hundred balloons of happiness, the single guitar of grief, is a boy like any other disappearing out the door, beside the schoolyard gate, where he has told his brothers they must wait. Collects the hands of Cecilio and Arturito, scuttles off dodging the many schoolyard colors, the elbows and wrists crisscrossing, the several shoes running. Grows small and smaller to the eye, dissolves into the bright horizon, flutters in the air before disappearing like a memory of kites.

Making Meanings

1. What exactly do you know from this little story about the character of Salvador and his setting?
2. What can you infer, or guess, is the cause of Salvador's "geography of scars" and "history of hurt"?
3. What could it be that "throbs with both fists and knows only what Salvador knows"?

4. How does Cisneros make you feel about Salvador when she describes his eyes as being the color of caterpillars? Think of another comparison that would have made you feel differently about Salvador.
5. Cisneros' short little story and Capote's longer story ("A Christmas Memory") both end with the same image. What are the final images in each story? Do they have the same effect on you? Try to explain why or why not.
6. Describe the emotional impact this story had on you.

Writing: Choose ONE of the two options

Essay Analyzing a Character

Focus on actions. Salvador seems to be in perpetual motion. If you want to get an idea of the many actions we watch Salvador carrying out, list the verbs that describe him or his movements, beginning with runs and continuing in the first paragraph with lives, shakes, ties, combs, feeds. In fact, Cisneros eventually drops the subject of her sentences (Salvador) and just opens with verbs—Salvador's actions. Take notes on Salvador's important actions and what they tell about the kind of boy he is. Write your analytical essay.

A Vignette

Using "Salvador Late or Early" as a model, write a vignette—a short literary sketch or portrait—of your own. Think of a character who will catch your readers' interest. Then, put him or her into an interesting situation. Use colorful verbs to show readers what your character does all day—early and late.