

SHORT STORY

Preparing to Read

La Bamba

by Gary Soto



What Do
You
Think

How can reading stories about events in the life of a young person like yourself give you insights into your own life?

QuickWrite

Most lists of "Top Ten Things People Fear Most" include "public speaking" and "performance in front of an audience." Have you ever had to perform in front of an audience? What was it like? Jot down a few notes about the experience.



Reader/Writer Notebook

Use your **RWN** to complete the activities for this selection.



Sunshine State Standards:

Benchmarks **LA.6.1.5.1** adjust reading rate based on purpose, text difficulty, form, and style; **LA.6.1.6.1** use new vocabulary that is introduced and taught directly; **LA.6.1.7.1** use background knowledge of subject

and related content areas, prereading strategies, graphic representations, and knowledge of text structure to make and confirm complex predictions of content, purpose, and organization of a reading selection; *Also covered* **LA.6.1.7.8**; **LA.6.2.1.1**

Literary Focus

Forms of Fiction: Short Story A **short story** is a brief fictional narrative usually from five to twenty pages long. Short stories can be about anything. Whatever they are about, though, they are built in the same way: They have a character or characters dealing with a conflict (problem), main events that lead to a climax, and a resolution of the conflict. These building blocks are also found in novels and novellas, but the short story is, well, short. The typical short story has just one or two main characters and one conflict. Good short stories deliver an emotional punch, and they deliver it fast.

Reading Focus

Making Predictions As you read, you make **predictions**, or educated guesses about what will happen next. You base your guesses on **clues**—details in the story—that the writer gives you, combined with what you already know from your own experience.

Into Action As you read “La Bamba,” use a prediction chart like the one below to keep track of the predictions you make about what will happen next. Identify the clues you have found, and then write down the predictions you made based on those clues.

| Clue | Prediction |
|---|--|
| Mr. Roybal gets frustrated with the record player during rehearsal. | The record player might not work during the talent show. |

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

Find It in Your Reading As you read this short story, identify at least five details that help make the main character, Manuel, and his experiences come alive for you. Copy these details into your *Reader/Writer Notebook*.

Vocabulary

jammed (jamd) v.: got stuck and became unworkable. *When the lever jammed, Mr. Roybal almost lost it.*

maneuvered (muh NOO vuhrd) v.: moved, as a group, into position. *The cast maneuvered back onto the stage.*

groove (groov) n.: state of being comfortable: *Manuel got into the groove once he felt more comfortable on the stage.*

cast (kast) n.: group of performers in a play or event. *The audience appreciated the cast's efforts.*

Language Coach

Oral Fluency Two of the words above have the same vowel sound, but that vowel sound is spelled in a different way in each word. Identify the two words that have the same vowel sound but very different spellings.



Learn It Online

For a preview of this story, see the video introduction on:

go.hrw.com

L6-17

Go

Gary Soto

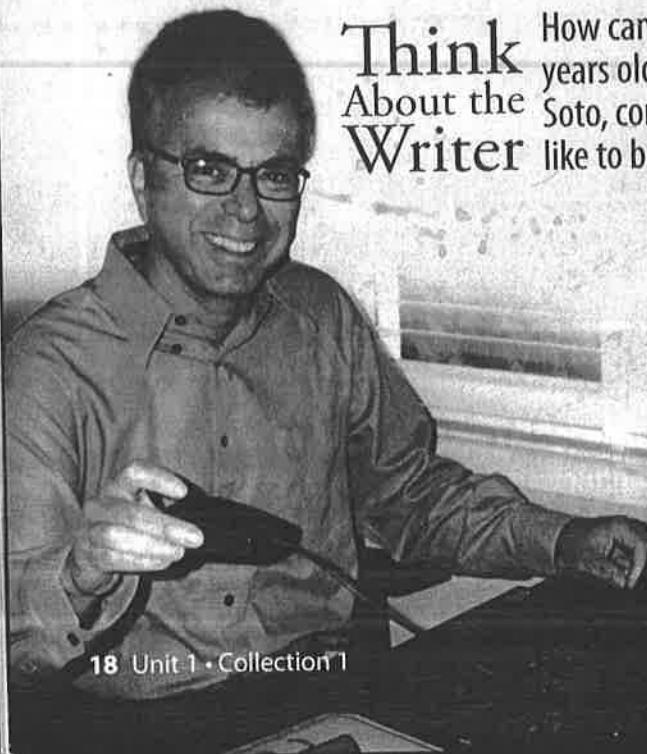
(1952–)

“My Friends . . . Jump Up and Down on the Page”

Gary Soto grew up in a Mexican American family in California’s San Joaquin (SAN waw KEEN) Valley. He remembers himself as an active kid who liked the playground better than the classroom and loved to compete against others in games. He was not a very good student, he claims, until he went to college and discovered poetry—and an urge to become a writer himself. He won recognition by recapturing the world of his childhood in words.

“When I first started writing recollections and short stories . . . I needed full-fledged stories and the patience of a monk. I needed to recall the narrative, characters, small moments, dates, places, etc. I was responsible for my writing, and, thus, it was tremendous work to keep it all in order. When I was writing *Living up the Street* . . . I wrote, rewrote, and rewrote the rewrite, so that my friends would jump up and down on the page.”

Think About the Writer How can a writer many years older than you, like Soto, convey what it’s like to be your age?



Build Background

The first digitally recorded music came on the market in the early 1980s in the form of audio CDs. The birth of the CD signaled the end of the long era of the vinyl record, which had been the primary audio format of the twentieth century.

Records are vinyl disks that contain cut grooves. These grooves correspond to sound waves. Putting a stylus, or needle, into the grooves and rotating the record on a turntable, or record player, made the stylus vibrate, which reproduced the recorded sounds.

Records got scratched easily by being dropped or mishandled—or even from a slip of the stylus that read the grooves. A scratch could ruin a record by making the needle get stuck, playing the same bit of music over and over.

Preview the Selection

Manuel is the story’s main character, an average kid attending a typical school. As the story begins, he is regretting his decision to participate in his school’s talent show.

Read with a Purpose Read the following short story to see how a boy close to your own age feels as he deals with being onstage in a school talent show.

La Bamba

by **Gary Soto**

Manuel was the fourth of seven children and looked like a lot of kids in his neighborhood: black hair, brown face, and skinny legs scuffed from summer play. But summer was giving way to fall: The trees were turning red, the lawns brown, and the pomegranate trees were heavy with fruit. Manuel walked to school in the frosty morning, kicking leaves and thinking of tomorrow's talent show. He was still amazed that he had volunteered. He was going to pretend to sing Ritchie Valens's¹ "La Bamba" before the entire school.

Why did I raise my hand? he asked himself, but in his heart he knew the answer. He yearned for the limelight. He wanted applause as loud as a thunderstorm and to hear his friends say, "Man, that was bad!" And he wanted to impress the girls, especially Petra Lopez, the second-prettiest girl in his class. The prettiest was already taken by his friend Ernie. Manuel knew he should be reasonable since he himself was not great-looking, just average. **A**

1. **Ritchie Valens** (1941–1959), the professional singer mentioned in the story, was the first Mexican American rock star. In 1959, when he was only seventeen, Valens was killed in a plane crash.

Manuel kicked through the fresh-fallen leaves. When he got to school, he realized he had forgotten his math workbook. If the teacher found out, he would have to stay after school and miss practice for the talent show. But fortunately for him, they did drills that morning.

During lunch Manuel hung around with Benny, who was also in the talent show. Benny was going to play the trumpet in spite of the fat lip he had gotten playing football.

"How do I look?" Manuel asked. He cleared his throat and started moving his lips in pantomime. No words came out, just a hiss that sounded like a snake. Manuel tried to look emotional, flailing his arms on the high notes and opening his eyes and mouth as wide as he could when he came to "Para bailar la baaaaammmba."²

After Manuel finished, Benny said it looked all right but suggested Manuel dance while he sang. Manuel thought for a moment and decided it was a good idea.

"Yeah, just think you're like Michael

2. **para bailar la bamba** (PAH rah BY lahr lah BAHM bah): Spanish for "to dance the bamba."

A Read and Discuss What is the author letting us know about Manuel?

Jackson or someone like that," Benny suggested. "But don't get carried away."

During rehearsal, Mr. Roybal, nervous about his debut as the school's talent co-ordinator, cursed under his breath when the lever that controlled the speed on the record player jammed.

"Darn," he growled, trying to force the lever. "What's wrong with you?"

"Is it broken?" Manuel asked, bending over for a closer look. It looked all right to him.

Mr. Roybal assured Manuel that he would have a good record player at the talent show, even if it meant bringing his own stereo from home. **B**

Manuel sat in a folding chair, twirling his record on his thumb. He watched a skit about personal hygiene, a mother-and-daughter violin duo, five first-grade girls jumping rope, a karate kid breaking boards, three girls singing "Like a Virgin," and a skit about the pilgrims. If the record player hadn't been broken, he would have gone after the karate kid, an easy act to follow, he told himself.

As he twirled his forty-five record, Manuel thought they had a great talent show. The entire school would be amazed. His mother and father would be proud, and his brothers and sisters would be jealous and pout. It would be a night to remember. **C**

Benny walked onto the stage, raised his trumpet to his mouth, and waited for

his cue. Mr. Roybal raised his hand like a symphony conductor and let it fall dramatically. Benny inhaled and blew so loud that Manuel dropped his record, which rolled across the cafeteria floor until it hit a wall. Manuel raced after it, picked it up, and wiped it clean.

"Boy, I'm glad it didn't break," he said with a sigh.

That night Manuel had to do the dishes and a lot of homework, so he could only practice in the shower. In bed he prayed that he wouldn't mess up. He prayed that it wouldn't be like when he was a first-grader. For Science Week he had wired together a C battery and a bulb and told everyone he had discovered how a flashlight worked. He was so pleased with himself that he practiced for hours pressing the wire to the battery, making the bulb wink a dim, orangish light. He showed it to so many kids in his neighborhood that when it was time to show his class how a flashlight worked, the battery was dead. He pressed the wire to the battery, but the bulb didn't respond. He pressed until his thumb hurt and some kids in the back started snickering.

But Manuel fell asleep confident that nothing would go wrong this time.

The next morning his father and mother beamed at him. They were proud that he was going to be in the talent show.

"I wish you would tell us what you're doing," his mother said. His father, a

B Reading Focus Making Predictions Based on this conversation between Manuel and Mr. Roybal, what do you predict will happen at the talent show?

C Read and Discuss What do Manuel's thoughts about his family indicate about him?

Vocabulary jammed (jamd) *v.*: got stuck and became unworkable.

pharmacist who wore a blue smock with his name on a plastic rectangle, looked up from the newspaper and sided with his wife. “Yes, what are you doing in the talent show?”

D “You’ll see,” Manuel said, with his mouth full of Cheerios.

The day whizzed by, and so did his afternoon chores and dinner. Suddenly he was dressed in his best clothes and standing next to Benny backstage, listening to the commotion as the cafeteria filled with school kids and parents. The lights dimmed, and Mr. Roybal, sweaty in a tight suit and a necktie with a large knot, wet his lips and parted the stage curtains.

E “Good evening, everyone,” the kids behind the curtain heard him say. “Good evening to you,” some of the smart-alecky kids said back to him.

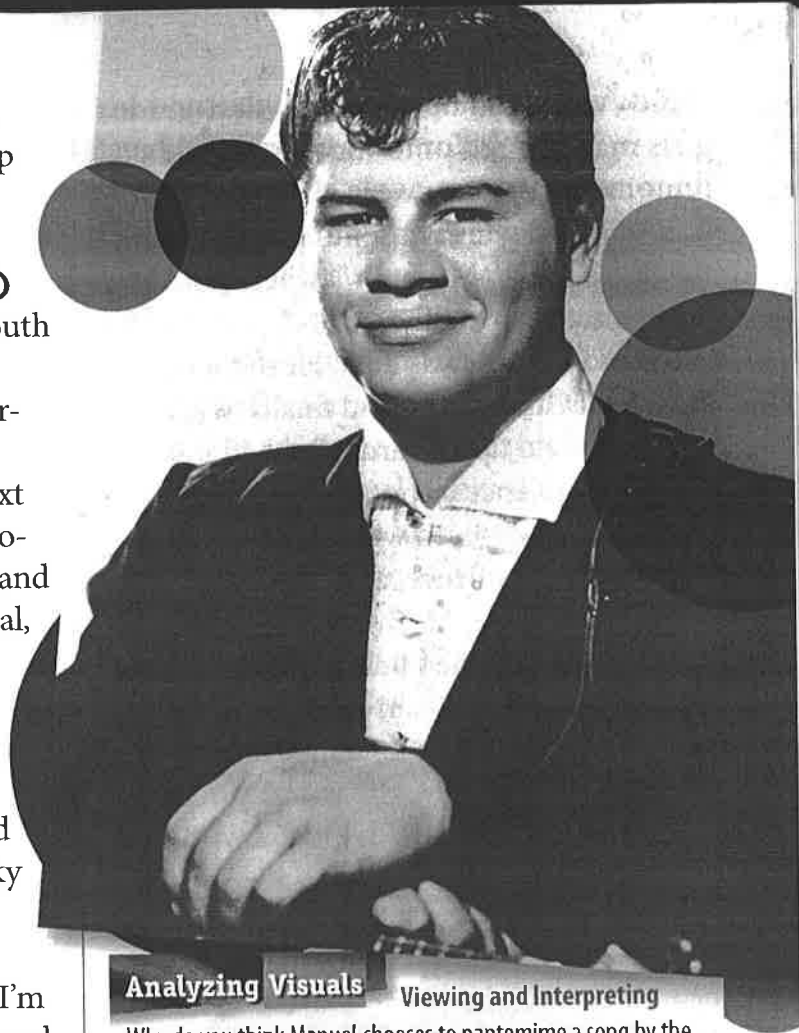
“Tonight we bring you the best John Burroughs Elementary has to offer, and I’m sure that you’ll be both pleased and amazed that our little school houses so much talent. And now, without further ado, let’s get on with the show.” He turned and, with a swish of his hand, commanded, “Part the curtain.” The curtains parted in jerks. A girl dressed as a toothbrush and a boy dressed as a dirty gray tooth walked onto the stage and sang:

Brush, brush, brush

Floss, floss, floss

Gargle the germs away—hey! hey! hey!

After they finished singing, they turned to Mr. Roybal, who dropped his hand. The toothbrush dashed around the stage after



Analyzing Visuals Viewing and Interpreting

Why do you think Manuel chooses to pantomime a song by the 1950s Latino rock star Ritchie Valens, shown here?

the dirty tooth, which was laughing and having a great time until it slipped and nearly rolled off the stage.

Mr. Roybal jumped out and caught it just in time. “Are you OK?”

The dirty tooth answered, “Ask my dentist,” which drew laughter and applause from the audience.

The violin duo played next, and except for one time when the girl got lost, they sounded fine. People applauded, and

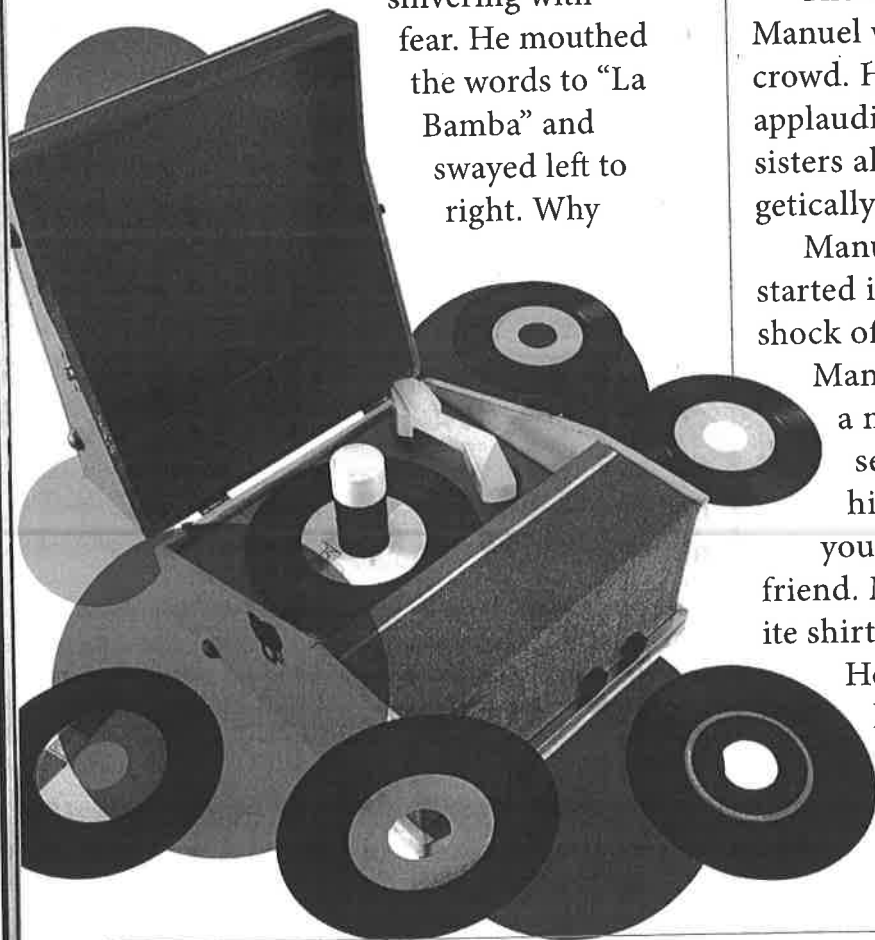
D Reading Focus Making Predictions What do you think will happen next? What clues in the story helped you make that prediction?

E Literary Focus Short Story What are the main events of the story so far? Who is the main character, and what does he want? What might stand in his way?

some even stood up. Then the first-grade girls maneuvered onto the stage while jumping rope. They were all smiles and bouncing ponytails as a hundred cameras flashed at once. Mothers “awhed” and fathers sat up proudly.

The karate kid was next. He did a few kicks, yells, and chops, and finally, when his father held up a board, punched it in two. The audience clapped and looked at each other, wide-eyed with respect. The boy bowed to the audience, and father and son ran off the stage.

Manuel remained behind the stage, shivering with fear. He mouthed the words to “La Bamba” and swayed left to right. Why



did he raise his hand and volunteer? Why couldn't he have just sat there like the rest of the kids and not said anything? While the karate kid was onstage, Mr. Roybal, more sweaty than before, took Manuel's forty-five record and placed it on a new record player. **F**

“You ready?” Mr. Roybal asked.

“Yeah . . .”

Mr. Roybal walked back on stage and announced that Manuel Gomez, a fifth-grader in Mrs. Knight's class, was going to pantomime Ritchie Valens's classic hit “La Bamba.”

The cafeteria roared with applause. Manuel was nervous but loved the noisy crowd. He pictured his mother and father applauding loudly and his brothers and sisters also clapping, though not as energetically.

Manuel walked on stage and the song started immediately. Glassy-eyed from the shock of being in front of so many people, Manuel moved his lips and swayed in a made-up dance step. He couldn't see his parents, but he could see his brother Mario, who was a year younger, thumb-wrestling with a friend. Mario was wearing Manuel's favorite shirt; he would deal with Mario later.

He saw some other kids get up and head for the drinking fountain, and a baby sitting in the middle of an aisle sucking her thumb and watching him intently.

What am I doing here? thought

F **Read and Discuss** How do you interpret what Manuel is feeling now?

Vocabulary **maneuvered** (muh N00 vuhrd) v.: moved, as a group, into position.

Manuel. This is no fun at all. Everyone was just sitting there. Some people were moving to the beat, but most were just watching him, like they would a monkey at the zoo. **G**

But when Manuel did a fancy dance step, there was a burst of applause and some girls screamed. Manuel tried another dance step. He heard more applause and screams and started getting into the groove as he shivered and snaked like Michael Jackson around the stage. But the record got stuck, and he had to sing

*Para bailar la bamba
Para bailar la bamba
Para bailar la bamba
Para bailar la bamba*

again and again. **H**

Manuel couldn't believe his bad luck. The audience began to laugh and stand up in their chairs. Manuel remembered how the forty-five record had dropped from his hand and rolled across the cafeteria floor. It probably got scratched, he thought, and now it was stuck, and he was stuck dancing and moving his lips to the same words over and over. He had never been so embarrassed. He would have to ask his parents to move the family out of town.

After Mr. Roybal ripped the needle across the record, Manuel slowed his dance steps to a halt. He didn't know what to do except bow to the audience, which applauded wildly, and scoot off the stage, on the verge of tears. This was worse than

the homemade flashlight. At least no one laughed then; they just snickered.

Manuel stood alone, trying hard to hold back the tears as Benny, center stage, played his trumpet. Manuel was jealous because he sounded great, then mad as he recalled that it was Benny's loud trumpet playing that made the forty-five record fly out of his hands. But when the entire cast lined up for a curtain call, Manuel received a burst of applause that was so loud it shook the walls of the cafeteria. Later, as he mingled with the kids and parents, everyone patted him on the shoulder and told him, "Way to go. You were really funny." **I**

Funny? Manuel thought. Did he do something funny?

Funny. Crazy. Hilarious. These were the words people said to him. He was confused but beyond caring. All he knew was that people were paying attention to him, and his brothers and sisters looked at him with a mixture of jealousy and awe. He was going to pull Mario aside and punch him in the arm for wearing his shirt, but he cooled it. He was enjoying the limelight. A teacher brought him cookies and punch, and the popular kids who had never before given him the time of day now clustered around him. Ricardo, the editor of the school bulletin, asked him how he made the needle stick.

"It just happened," Manuel said, crunching on a star-shaped cookie.

At home that night his father, eager

G Read and Discuss What does Manuel mean when he says that people "were watching him, like they would a monkey at the zoo"? What is he feeling?

H Reading Focus Making Predictions What earlier clues indicated that something like this might happen?

I Read and Discuss What's the reaction to Manuel's performance? Explain whether this matches his concept of what happened.

Vocabulary groove (groov) *n.*: state of being comfortable.

cast (kast) *n.*: group of performers in a play or event.

Analyzing Visuals

Viewing and Interpreting
Is this audience reacting the way you imagined Manuel's audience reacted? Why or why not?



to undo the buttons on his shirt and ease into his La-Z-Boy recliner, asked Manuel the same thing, how he managed to make the song stick on the words “Para bailar la bamba.”

Manuel thought quickly and reached for scientific jargon he had read in magazines. “Easy, Dad. I used laser tracking with high optics and low functional decibels per channel.” His proud but confused father told him to be quiet and go to bed. **J**

“Ah, que niños tan truchas,”³ he said as

3. **que niños tan truchas** (kay NEEN yohs tahn TROO chahs): Spanish for “what smart kids.”

he walked to the kitchen for a glass of milk. “I don’t know how you kids nowadays get so smart.”

Manuel, feeling happy, went to his bedroom, undressed, and slipped into his pajamas. He looked in the mirror and began to pantomime “La Bamba,” but stopped because he was tired of the song. He crawled into bed. The sheets were as cold as the moon that stood over the peach tree in their backyard.

He was relieved that the day was over. Next year, when they asked for volunteers for the talent show, he wouldn’t raise his hand. Probably. **K**

J Literary Focus Short Story Interpret Manuel’s answer to his father’s question. Why does he give his father a different answer than he gave Ricardo?

K Read and Discuss What does it tell us about Manuel that he probably won’t volunteer for the talent show next year?

Applying Your Skills

La Bamba



Sunshine State Standards: Benchmarks

LA.6.1.7.1 use background knowledge of subject and related content areas, prereading strategies, graphic representations, and knowledge of text structure to make and confirm complex predictions of content, purpose, and organization of a reading selection; *Also covered* LA.6.1.7.4; LA.6.1.7.8; LA.6.2.1.2; LA.6.4.1.1

Respond and Think Critically

Reading Focus

1. What was the author's purpose for writing this story? **FCAT**
 - A to entertain readers through humor
 - B to describe his own childhood experience
 - C to inform readers about his favorite song
 - D to persuade readers to try out for talent shows

Read with a Purpose

2. How does Manuel feel about the talent show before, during, and after his performance? Support your answer with details from the story. **READ THINK EXPLAIN**

Reading Skills: Making Predictions

3. Look at the prediction chart you filled in as you read the story. Now, add a third column to the chart and fill it in with what actually happened. Did things turn out as expected?

| Clue | Prediction | What Actually Happened |
|---|--|------------------------|
| Mr. Roybal gets frustrated with the record player during rehearsal. | The record player might not work during the talent show. | |

Literary Focus

Literary Analysis

4. **Compare** Compare Manuel's concept of what being in the talent show would be like to what actually happened. Why didn't the

audience see Manuel's performance as a disaster?

5. **Infer** How likely is it that Manuel will volunteer for the talent show next year? Use examples from the story to support your answer. **READ THINK EXPLAIN**
6. **Extend** What does this story show us about how things don't always turn out the way we hope or expect them to? What lesson can readers draw from this clash of expectations and reality?

Literary Skills: Short Story

7. **Analyze** What is the major **conflict**, or problem, that Manuel must overcome in this story? How is the conflict finally resolved?

Literary Skills Review: Similes

8. **Interpret** A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike things using a word such as *like* or *as*. Identify the simile used to describe the audience as Manuel takes the stage. What does this comparison indicate about Manuel?

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

Use It in Your Writing Write a short narrative about another talent show participant. Use descriptive details to bring the character to life.



How would you react to a potentially embarrassing situation like Manuel's talent show experience?

Applying Your Skills

La Bamba

Vocabulary Development

Words with Multiple Meanings

Multiple-meaning words have more than one meaning. Often, the different meanings are completely unrelated to one another. When you look up a multiple-meaning word in a dictionary, you'll find a numbered list of definitions, as in this example:

shower (SHOW uhr) *n.* **1.** a brief rainfall **2.** a party at which someone is honored and given gifts **3.** a bath in which water pours down on the body —*v.* **1.** to spray **2.** to pour forth like a shower **3.** to take a shower

If you see a multiple-meaning word and you're not sure which definition is intended, look at the word's **context**, or the meaning that surrounds it. If the word *shower* appears with words like *weather*, *rain*, *soaked*, or *umbrella*, you know that *shower* must refer to rainfall. If you're still confused, look at the definitions listed in a dictionary and choose the one that fits best in the sentence.

Here is a sentence from "La Bamba." Which definition of *shower* fits best in this context?

"That night Manuel had to do the dishes and a lot of homework, so he could only practice in the shower."

The sentence below is not from the story. Which definition of *shower* fits best in this context?

Manuel's family threw his older sister a shower before her wedding.

Your Turn

Choose two of the Vocabulary words to the right. For each, write *two* sentences that show *two* distinct meanings of the word. Use a dictionary for help.

jammed
maneuvered
groove
cast

Language Coach

Oral Fluency Many words in English have the same vowel sound but different spellings. The examples at right have the same /oo/ sound, but each is spelled in a different way. A Vocabulary word above, *maneuvered*, shows you a third way to spell this /oo/ sound. Think of three word pairs that have the same vowel sound but different spellings.

new
boot

Academic Vocabulary

Talk About . . .

Describe Manuel's concept of his family. What do his views indicate about his relationship with them? Interpret Manuel's ideas about his family, and write your ideas in your *Reader/Writer Notebook*.



Learn It Online

For vocabulary tutorials, visit *WordSharp* on:

go.hrw.com

L6-26

Go

**Sunshine State Standards: Benchmarks**

LA.6.1.5.1 adjust reading rate based on purpose, text difficulty, form, and style; **LA.6.1.6.1** use new vocabulary that is introduced and taught directly; **LA.6.1.6.9** determine the correct meaning of words with multiple meanings in context; **LA.6.3.4.4** the eight parts of speech (noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective,

conjunction, preposition, interjection); **LA.6.4.2.1** write in a variety of informational/expository forms (e.g., summaries, procedures, instructions, experiments, rubrics, how-to manuals, assembly instructions); **LA.6.6.4.1** use appropriate available technologies to enhance communication and achieve a purpose (e.g., video, online).

Grammar Link

Common and Proper Nouns

What is “La Bamba”? It’s the name of a story—and the title of a song. It’s a **noun**—a word used to name a person, place, thing, or idea.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Persons | Manuel, mother, Benny |
| Places | neighborhood, John Burroughs Elementary School, cafeteria |
| Things | stage, song, “La Bamba” |
| Ideas | limelight, talent, luck |

A **common noun** is a general name for a person, place, thing, or idea, while a **proper noun** names a particular one. A proper noun begins with a capital letter, while a common noun is not capitalized.

| Common Noun | Proper Noun |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| school | John Burroughs Elementary School |
| teacher | Mrs. Knight |
| brother | Mario |
| song | “La Bamba” |

Your Turn

In the sentences that follow, underline the common nouns and circle the proper nouns.

1. Manuel decides to pantomime a song in the talent show.
2. The boy practices singing “La Bamba” in the shower.
3. Mario is thumb-wrestling with a friend.
4. Manuel will confront his brother later.
5. Ritchie Valens, a 1950s rock star, was killed in a plane crash.

CHOICES

As you respond to the Choices, use these **Academic Vocabulary** words as appropriate: features, interpret, concept, indicate.

REVIEW

Analyze the Story

Timed Writing In a brief essay, identify the main character of “La Bamba” and the **conflict**, or problem, he faces. Identify the **climax** of the story—the most exciting part—and describe how the conflict is resolved. Then, indicate whether the resolution is believable. Support your conclusion with details from the story.

CONNECT

Create a Brochure

Group Work With a small group, develop a concept for a brochure called “How to Deal with Stage Fright.” Find articles and books on the topic and interview people who do a lot of performing or public speaking, such as musicians and business consultants. Write up the information you’ve collected in the form of a brochure.

EXTEND

Research Two Technologies

TechFocus Find information in a library or on the Internet that explains the way sound is recorded and played back in vinyl records and compact discs. Draw diagrams to help explain the process of recording sounds. Add captions that point out which features are similar and different between the two formats.



Learn It Online

There’s more to this story than meets the eye. Learn more with these Internet links at:

go.hrw.com

L6-27

