

## Zebra

Short Story by Chaim Potok

# *What has the power to* **HEAL?**



R3.3 Analyze characterization as delineated through a character's thoughts, words, speech patterns, and actions; the narrator's description; and the thoughts, words, and actions of other characters.

Also included in this lesson: R1.1 (p. 206), W2.1 (p. 207), LC1.4 (p. 207)

**KEY IDEA** You never know what kind of wounds will cause the greatest damage. An argument with a friend can cause as much pain as a broken leg. Likewise, a physical injury can also scar the spirit. In “Zebra,” you will read about a boy your age who needs to **heal** both his body and his mind.

**LIST IT** With a partner, create two lists. In the first, list three to five ways people cope with physical injuries or disabilities. In the second, identify at least three ways that people deal with emotional pain.



## LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTER


People who appear in stories are called **characters**. A story usually focuses on one or two **main characters** who change during the story. You learn about these characters from

- their thoughts, words, speech patterns, and actions
- the narrator’s descriptions
- the thoughts, words, and actions of other characters

The less important characters, known as **minor characters**, help the reader learn more about the main characters. As you read, notice each character’s role in the story.

## READING STRATEGY: VISUALIZE

To **visualize** while you read, use descriptions from a story and your knowledge and imagination to form mental pictures. As you read, record these descriptions and then sketch the mental pictures they help you form.

Descriptions	Mental Picture
<i>“They were odd-looking creatures, like stubby horses, short-legged, thick-necked, with dark and white stripes.”</i>	

**Review:** Make Inferences

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Chaim Potok uses the boldfaced words to help tell a story of pain and healing. To see how many you know, substitute a different word or phrase for each one.

1. He tried not to **grimace** in pain.
2. It was hard to unwrap the **intricate** bandage.
3. She is a firm **disciplinarian**.
4. The animal looked **gaunt** and underfed.
5. They skipped **jauntily** down the path.
6. He **wincing** when he got a flu shot.
7. A cast might **chafe** your skin.
8. We saw the **contour** of the jagged mountain.
9. She appeared **somber** when she heard the bad news.
10. They applauded our team **exuberantly**.

### Early Days

While growing up in New York City, Chaim Potok lived the strict life of a Hasidic Jew. His parents wanted him to be a religious scholar. But by the time he was 16, Potok had started reading



Chaim Potok  
1929–2002

literature other than traditional Jewish texts. The more he read, the more he struggled between religious learning and the call to become a creative artist.

**Coming to Terms** Potok eventually left the Hasidic community for the Conservative movement of Judaism. He became a rabbi and published his first novel in 1967. Much of Potok’s writing centers on characters who try to live in both the spiritual world and the secular world of everyday life.



### MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more on Chaim Potok, visit the Literature Center at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).

### Background

**Vietnam War** One of the characters in this story is a veteran of the Vietnam War. U.S. troops fought in Vietnam from 1965 until 1973. Approximately 58,000 Americans died there, and more than 300,000 were wounded. In 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was unveiled in Washington, D.C., to honor the men and women who served in the war. A black granite wall bears the names of those who died.

# ZEBRA

CHAIM POTOK

**H**e couldn't remember when he began to be called by that name. Perhaps they started to call him Zebra when he first began running. Or maybe he began running when they started to call him Zebra.

He loved the name and he loved to run.

When he was very young, his parents took him to a zoo, where he saw zebras for the first time. They were odd-looking creatures, like stubby horses, short-legged, thick-necked, with dark and white stripes.

Then one day he went with his parents to a movie about Africa, and he saw zebras, hundreds of them, thundering across a grassy plain, dust rising in boiling brown clouds. **A**

## ANALYZE VISUALS

Examine the photograph. What images can you identify?

## **A** VISUALIZE

Reread lines 8–10. What words help you picture the scene in the movie?



Was he already running before he saw that movie, or did he begin to run afterward? No one seemed able to remember.

He would go running through the neighborhood for the sheer joy of feeling the wind on his face. People said that when he ran he arched his head up and back, and his face kind of flattened out. One of his teachers told him it was clever to run that way, his balance was better. But the truth was he ran that way, his head thrown back, because he loved to feel the wind rushing across his neck.

Each time, after only a few minutes of running, his legs would begin to feel wondrously light. He would run past the school and the homes on the street beyond the church. All the neighbors knew him and would wave and call out, “Go, Zebra!” And sometimes one or two of their dogs would run with him awhile, barking.

He would imagine himself a zebra on the African plain. Running. **B**

There was a hill on Franklin Avenue, a steep hill. By the time he reached that hill, he would feel his legs so light it was as if he had no legs at all and was flying. He would begin to descend the hill, certain as he ran that he needed only to give himself the slightest push and off he would go, and instead of a zebra he would become the bird he had once seen in a movie about Alaska, he would swiftly change into an eagle, soaring higher and higher, as light as the gentlest breeze, the cool wind caressing his arms and legs and neck.

**T**hen, a year ago, racing down Franklin Avenue, he had given himself that push and had begun to turn into an eagle, when a huge rushing shadow appeared in his line of vision and crashed into him and plunged him into a darkness from which he emerged very, very slowly. . . .

“Never, never, *never* run down that hill so fast that you can’t stop at the corner,” his mother had warned him again and again.

His schoolmates and friends kept calling him Zebra even after they all knew that the doctors had told him he would never be able to run like that again. **C**

His leg would heal in time, the doctors said, and perhaps in a year or so the brace would come off. But they were not at all certain about his hand. From time to time his injured hand, which he still wore in a sling, would begin to hurt. The doctors said they could find no cause for the pain.

One morning, during Mr. Morgan’s geography class, Zebra’s hand began to hurt badly. He sat staring out the window at the sky. Mr. Morgan, a stiff-mannered person in his early fifties, given to smart suits and dapper bow ties, called on him to respond to a question. Zebra stumbled about in vain for the answer. Mr. Morgan told him to pay attention to the geography inside the classroom and not to the geography outside.

**B CHARACTER**

Reread lines 13–24.  
How does Zebra feel about running?

**C MAKE INFERENCES**

What happened to Zebra a year ago? What details tell you this?

“In this class, young man, you will concentrate your attention upon the earth, not upon the sky,” Mr. Morgan said.

**L**ater, in the schoolyard during the midmorning recess, Zebra stood near the tall fence, looking out at the street and listening to the noises behind him.

His schoolmates were racing about, playing **exuberantly**, shouting and laughing with full voices. Their joyous sounds went ringing through the quiet street.

60 Most times Zebra would stand alongside the basketball court or behind the wire screen at home plate and watch the games. That day, because his hand hurt so badly, he stood alone behind the chain-link fence of the schoolyard. **D**

That’s how he happened to see the man. And that’s how the man happened to see him.

One minute the side street on which the school stood was strangely empty, without people or traffic, without even any of the dogs that often roamed about the neighborhood—vacant and silent, as if it were already in the full heat of summer. The red-brick ranch house that belonged to  
70 Mr. Morgan, and the white clapboard two-story house in which Mrs. English lived, and the other homes on the street, with their columned front porches and their back patios, and the tall oaks—all stood curiously still in the warm golden light of the mid-morning sun. **E**

Then a man emerged from wide and busy Franklin Avenue at the far end of the street.

Zebra saw the man stop at the corner and stand looking at a public trash can. He watched as the man poked his hand into the can and fished about but seemed to find nothing he wanted. He withdrew the hand and, raising it to shield his eyes from the sunlight, glanced at the street sign on  
80 the lamppost.

He started to walk up the street in the direction of the school.

He was tall and wiry, and looked to be about forty years old. In his right hand he carried a bulging brown plastic bag. He wore a khaki army jacket, a blue denim shirt, blue jeans, and brown cowboy boots. His **gaunt** face and muscular neck were reddened by exposure to the sun. Long brown hair spilled out below his dark-blue farmer’s cap. On the front of the cap, in large orange letters, were the words LAND ROVER.<sup>1</sup>

He walked with his eyes on the sidewalk and the curb, as if looking for something, and he went right past Zebra without noticing him.

90 Zebra’s hand hurt very much. He was about to turn away when he saw the man stop and look around and peer up at the red-brick wall of

**exuberantly**

(ĭg-zōō’bēr-ənt-lē) *adv.*  
in a manner showing  
enthusiasm or joy

**D CHARACTER**

Why does Zebra stand alone and watch the other students run and play?

**E VISUALIZE**

Reread lines 66–73. What descriptions help you see the street in your mind? Record them in your chart.

**gaunt** (gōnt) *adj.* thin and bony

1. **Land Rover:** British automaker known for producing four-wheel-drive vehicles.

the school. The man set down the bag and took off his cap and stuffed it into a pocket of his jacket. From one of his jeans pockets he removed a handkerchief, with which he then wiped his face. He shoved the handkerchief back into the pocket and put the cap back on his head. **F**

Then he turned and saw Zebra.

He picked up the bag and started down the street to where Zebra was standing. When the man was about ten feet away, Zebra noticed that the left sleeve of his jacket was empty.

100 The man came up to Zebra and said in a low, friendly, shy voice, “Hello.”

Zebra answered with a cautious “Hello,” trying not to look at the empty sleeve, which had been tucked into the man’s jacket pocket.

The man asked, with a distinct Southern accent, “What’s your name, son?”

Zebra said, “Adam.”

“What kind of school is this here school, Adam?”

“It’s a good school,” Zebra answered.

“How long before you-all begin your summer vacation?”

110 “Three days,” Zebra said.

“Anything special happen here during the summer?”

“During the summer? Nothing goes on here. There are no classes.”

“What do you-all do during the summer?”

“Some of us go to camp. Some of us hang around. We find things to do.”

Zebra’s hand had begun to tingle and throb. Why was the man asking all those questions? Zebra thought maybe he shouldn’t be talking to him at all. He seemed vaguely menacing in that army jacket, the dark-blue cap with the words LAND ROVER on it in orange letters, and the empty sleeve.

120 Yet there was kindness in his gray eyes and ruddy features.

The man gazed past Zebra at the students playing in the yard. “Adam, do you think your school would be interested in having someone teach an art class during the summer?”

That took Zebra by surprise. “An *art* class?”

“Drawing, sculpting, things like that.”

Zebra was trying *very hard* not to look at the man’s empty sleeve.

“I don’t know. . . .”

“Where’s the school office, Adam?”

“On Washington Avenue. Go to the end of the street and turn right.”

130 “Thanks,” the man said. He hesitated a moment. Then he asked, in a quiet voice, “What happened to you, Adam?”

“A car hit me,” Zebra said. “It was my fault.”

The man seemed to **wince**.

### **F CHARACTER**

Reread lines 74–95. What are your first impressions of this new character?

**wince** (wĭns) v. to draw back, as in pain or distress



For a flash of a second, Zebra thought to ask the man what had happened to *him*. The words were on his tongue. But he kept himself from saying anything.

The man started back up the street, carrying the brown plastic bag. Zebra suddenly called, “Hey, mister.”

The man stopped and turned. “My name is John Wilson,” he said softly.

140 “Mr. Wilson, when you go into the school office, you’ll see signs on two doors. One says ‘Dr. Winter,’ and the other says ‘Mrs. English.’ Ask for Mrs. English.”

Dr. Winter, the principal, was a **disciplinarian** and a grump. Mrs. English, the assistant principal, was generous and kind. Dr. Winter would probably tell the man to call his secretary for an appointment. Mrs. English might invite him into her office and offer him a cup of coffee and listen to what he had to say.

#### ANALYZE VISUALS

What might you **infer** from this figure’s body language?

#### **disciplinarian**

(dĭs’ə-plĕ-nâr’ē-ən) *n.*  
someone who enforces strict discipline, or rules



The man hesitated, looking at Zebra.

“Appreciate the advice,” he said. **G**

150 Zebra watched him walk to the corner.

Under the lamppost was a trash can. Zebra saw the man set down the plastic bag and stick his hand into the can and haul out a battered umbrella.

The man tried to open the umbrella, but its metal ribs were broken. The black fabric dangled flat and limp from the pole. He put the umbrella into the plastic bag and headed for the entrance to the school.

A moment later, Zebra heard the whistle that signaled the end of recess. He followed his classmates at a distance, careful to avoid anyone’s bumping against his hand.

160 **H**e sat through his algebra class, copying the problems on the blackboard while holding down his notebook with his left elbow. The sling **chafed** his neck and felt warm and clumsy on his bare arm. There were sharp pains now in the two curled fingers of his hand.

Right after the class he went downstairs to the office of Mrs. Walsh, a cheerful, gray-haired woman in a white nurse’s uniform.

She said, “I’m sorry I can’t do very much for you, Adam, except give you two Tylenols.”

He swallowed the Tylenols down with water.

On his way back up to the second floor, he saw the man with the dark-  
170 blue cap emerge from the school office with Mrs. English. He stopped on the stairs and watched as the man and Mrs. English stood talking together. Mrs. English nodded and smiled and shook the man’s hand.

The man walked down the corridor, carrying the plastic bag, and left the school building.

Zebra went slowly to his next class.

The class was taught by Mrs. English, who came hurrying into the room some minutes after the bell had rung.

“I apologize for being late,” she said, sounding a little out of breath.

“There was an important matter I had to attend to.”

180 Mrs. English was a tall, gracious woman in her forties. It was common knowledge that early in her life she had been a journalist on a Chicago newspaper and had written short stories, which she could not get published. Soon after her marriage to a doctor, she had become a teacher.

This was the only class Mrs. English taught.

Ten students from the upper school—seventh and eighth grades—were chosen every year for this class. They met for an hour three times a week

**G CHARACTER**

Why did Zebra give Mr. Wilson advice?

**chafe** (chāf) v. to irritate by rubbing

and told one another stories. Each story would be discussed and analyzed by Mrs. English and the class.

Mrs. English called it a class in the *imagination*.

190 Zebra was grateful he did not have to take notes in this class. He had only to listen to the stories.

That day, Andrea, the freckle-faced, redheaded girl with very thick glasses who sat next to Zebra, told about a woman scientist who discovered a method of healing trees that had been blasted apart by lightning.

Mark, who had something wrong with his upper lip, told in his quavery<sup>2</sup> voice about a selfish space cadet who stepped into a time machine and met his future self, who turned out to be a hateful person, and how the cadet then returned to the present and changed himself.

Kevin talked in blurred, high-pitched tones and often related parts  
200 of his stories with his hands. Mrs. English would quietly repeat many of his sentences. Today he told about an explorer who set out on a journey through a valley filled with yellow stones and surrounded by red mountains, where he encountered an army of green shadows that had been at war for hundreds of years with an army of purple shadows. The explorer showed them how to make peace. **H**

When it was Zebra's turn, he told a story about a bird that one day crashed against a closed windowpane and broke a wing. A boy tried to heal the wing but couldn't. The bird died, and the boy buried it under a tree on his lawn.

210 When he had finished, there was silence. Everyone in the class was looking at him.

"You always tell such sad stories," Andrea said.

The bell rang. Mrs. English dismissed the class.

In the hallway, Andrea said to Zebra, "You know, you are a very gloomy life form."

"Andrea, get off my case," Zebra said. **I**

**H**e went out to the schoolyard for the midafternoon recess. On the other side of the chain-link fence was the man in the dark-blue cap.

Zebra went over to him.

220 "Hello again, Adam," the man said. "I've been waiting for you."

"Hello," said Zebra.

"Thanks much for suggesting I talk to Mrs. English."

"You're welcome."

"Adam, you at all interested in art?"

"No."

#### **H** MAKE INFERENCES

What do all the students in Mrs. English's class have in common with Zebra? Cite details to support your answer.

#### **I** CHARACTER

What does Andrea's comment tell you about Zebra?

---

2. **quavery** (kwā'vēr-ē): quivering or trembling.

“You ever try your hand at it?”

“I’ve made drawings for class. I don’t like it.”

“Well, just in case you change your mind, I’m giving an art class in your school during the summer.”

230 “I’m going to camp in August,” Zebra said.

“There’s the big long month of July.”

“I don’t think so,” Zebra said.

“Well, okay, suit yourself. I’d like to give you something, a little thank-you gift.”

He reached into an inside pocket and drew out a small pad and a pen. He placed the pad against the fence.

“Adam, you want to help me out a little bit here? Put your fingers through the fence and grab hold of the pad.”

240 Extending the fingers of his right hand, Zebra held the pad to the fence and watched as the man began to work with the pen. He felt the pad move slightly.

“I need you to hold it real still,” the man said.

250 He was standing bent over, very close to Zebra. The words LAND ROVER ON his cap shone in the afternoon sunlight. As he worked, he glanced often at Zebra. His tongue kept pushing up against the insides of his cheeks, making tiny hills rise and fall on his face. Wrinkles formed **intricate** spidery webs in the skin below his gray eyes. On his smooth forehead, in the blue and purple shadows beneath the peak of his cap, lay glistening beads of sweat. And his hand—how dirty it was, the fingers and palm smudged with black ink and encrusted with colors.

260 Then Zebra glanced down and noticed the plastic bag near the man’s feet. It lay partly open. Zebra was able to see a large pink armless doll, a dull metallic object that looked like a dented frying pan, old newspapers, strings of cord, crumpled pieces of red and blue cloth, and the broken umbrella.

### ANALYZE VISUALS

How does the sketch in this photo **compare** with your mental image of Zebra?

**intricate** (ɪnˈtrɪ-kɪt) *adj.*  
arranged in a complex way; elaborate



“One more minute is all I need,” the man said.

He stepped back, looked at the pad, and nodded slowly. He put the pen back into his pocket and tore the top page from the pad. He rolled up the page and pushed it through the fence. Then he took the pad  
270 from Zebra.

“See you around, Adam,” the man said, picking up the plastic bag.

Zebra unrolled the sheet of paper and saw a line drawing, a perfect image of his face. **J**

He was looking at himself as if in a mirror. His long straight nose and thin lips and sad eyes and gaunt face; his dark hair and smallish ears and the scar on his forehead where he had hurt himself years before while roller skating.

In the lower right-hand corner of the page the man had written: “To Adam, with thanks. John Wilson.”

280 Zebra raised his eyes from the drawing. The man was walking away. Zebra called out, “Mr. Wilson, all my friends call me Zebra.”

The man turned, looking surprised.

“From my last name,” Adam said. “Zebrin. Adam Martin Zebrin. They call me Zebra.”

“Is that right?” the man said, starting back toward the fence. “Well, in that case you want to give me back that piece of paper.”

He took the pad and pen from his pocket, placed the page on the pad, and, with Zebra holding the pad to the fence, did something to the page and then handed it back.

290 “You take real good care of yourself, Zebra,” the man said.

He went off toward Franklin Avenue.

Zebra looked at the drawing. The man had crossed out Adam and over it had drawn an animal with a stubby neck and short legs and a striped body.

A zebra!

Its legs were in full gallop. It seemed as if it would gallop right off the page.

A strong breeze rippled across the drawing, causing it to flutter like a flag in Zebra’s hand. He looked out at the street.

300 The man was walking slowly in the shadows of the tall oaks. Zebra had the odd sensation that all the houses on the street had turned toward the man and were watching him as he walked along. How strange that was: the windows and porches and columns and front doors following intently the slow walk of that tall, one-armed man—until he turned into Franklin Avenue and was gone. **K**

**J MAKE INFERENCES**

Why do you think Mr. Wilson drew the picture of Zebra?

**K VISUALIZE**

Reread lines 300–305. What images do you see in your mind?

**T**he whistle blew, and Zebra went inside. Seated at his desk, he slipped the drawing carefully into one of his notebooks.

From time to time he glanced at it.

Just before the bell signaled the end of the school day, he looked at it again.

310 Now *that* was strange!

He thought he remembered that the zebra had been drawn directly over his name: the head over the A and the tail over the M. Didn't it seem now to have moved a little beyond the A?

Probably he was running a fever again. He would run mysterious fevers off and on for about three weeks after each operation on his hand. Fevers sometimes did that to him: excited his imagination.

He lived four blocks from the school. The school bus dropped him off at his corner. In his schoolbag he carried his books and the notebook with the drawing.

320 His mother offered him a snack, but he said he wasn't hungry. Up in his room, he looked again at the drawing and was astonished to discover that the zebra had reached the edge of his name and appeared poised to leap off.

It *had* to be a fever that was causing him to see the zebra that way. And sure enough, when his mother took his temperature, the thermometer registered 102.6 degrees.

She gave him his medicine, but it didn't seem to have much effect, because when he woke at night and switched on his desk light and peered at the drawing, he saw the little zebra galloping across the page, along the **contours** of his face, over the hills and valleys of his eyes and nose and

330 mouth, and he heard the tiny clickings of its hooves as cloudlets of dust rose in its wake.

He knew he was asleep. He knew it was the fever working upon his imagination.

But it was so real.

The little zebra running . . .

When he woke in the morning the fever was gone, and the zebra was quietly in its place over ADAM.

**contour** (kŏn'tŏŏr') *n.*  
the outline of a figure  
or body

**L**ater, as he entered the school, he noticed a large sign on the bulletin board in the hallway:

340 **SUMMER ART CLASS**

The well-known American artist Mr. John Wilson will conduct an art class during the summer for students in 7th and 8th grades. For details, speak to Mrs. English. There will be no tuition fee for this class.

During the morning, between classes, Zebra ran into Mrs. English in the second-floor hallway.

“Mrs. English, about the summer art class . . . is it okay to ask where—um—where Mr. Wilson is from?”

“He is from a small town in Virginia. Are you thinking of signing  
350 up for his class?”

“I can’t draw,” Zebra said.

“Drawing is something you can learn.”

“Mrs. English, is it okay to ask how did Mr. Wilson—um—get hurt?”

The school corridors were always crowded between classes. Zebra and Mrs. English formed a little island in the bustling, student-jammed hallway.

“Mr. Wilson was wounded in the war in Vietnam,” Mrs. English said.

“I would urge you to join his class. You will get to use your imagination.”

For the next hour, Zebra sat impatiently through Mr. Morgan’s geography class, and afterward he went up to the teacher.

360 “Mr. Morgan, could I—um—ask where is Vietnam?”

Mr. Morgan smoothed down the jacket of his beige summer suit, touched his bow tie, rolled down a wall map, picked up his pointer, and cleared his throat.

“Vietnam is this long, narrow country in southeast Asia, bordered by China, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>3</sup> It is a land of valleys in the north, coastal plains in the center, and marshes in the south. There are barren mountains and tropical rain forests. Its chief crops are rice, rubber, fruits, and vegetables. The population numbers close to seventy million people. Between 1962 and 1973, America fought a terrible war there to prevent  
370 the south from falling into the hands of the communist north. We lost the war.”

“Thank you.”

“I am impressed by your suddenly awakened interest in geography, young man, though I must remind you that your class is studying the Mediterranean,” said Mr. Morgan.

During the afternoon recess, Zebra was watching a heated basketball game, when he looked across the yard and saw John Wilson walk by, carrying a laden plastic bag. Some while later, he came back along the street, empty-handed.

380 **O**ver supper that evening, Zebra told his parents he was thinking of taking a summer art class offered by the school.

His father said, “Well, I think that’s a fine idea.”

“Wait a minute. I’m not so sure,” his mother said.

### SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



In 1976 North Vietnam and South Vietnam were reunited into one country, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

3. **Laos** (lous) . . . **Cambodia** (kăm-bō’dē-ə): countries in southeast Asia.

“It’ll get him off the streets,” his father said. “He’ll become a Matisse<sup>4</sup> instead of a lawyer like his dad. Right, Adam?”

“Just you be very careful,” his mother said to Adam. “Don’t do anything that might injure your hand.”

“How can drawing hurt his left hand, for heaven’s sake?” said his father.

That night, Zebra lay in bed looking at his hand. It was a dread and  
390 a mystery to him, his own hand. The fingers were all there, but like dead leaves that never fell, the ring and little fingers were rigid and curled, the others barely moved. The doctors said it would take time to bring them back to life. So many broken bones. So many torn muscles and tendons. So many injured nerves. The dark shadow had sprung upon him so suddenly. How stupid, stupid, *stupid* he had been! **L**

He couldn’t sleep. He went over to his desk and looked at John Wilson’s drawing. The galloping little zebra stood very still over ADAM.

**L VISUALIZE**

Reread lines 389–395. Notice the description of Zebra’s hand. What words help you visualize how it looks?

**E**arly the following afternoon, on the last day of school, Zebra went to Mrs. English’s office and signed up for John Wilson’s summer art class.

400 “The class will meet every weekday from ten in the morning until one,” said Mrs. English. “Starting Monday.”

Zebra noticed the three plastic bags in a corner of the office.

“Mrs. English, is it okay to ask what Mr. Wilson—um—did in Vietnam?”

“He told me he was a helicopter pilot,” Mrs. English said. “Oh, I neglected to mention that you are to bring an unlined notebook and a pencil to the class.” **M**

“That’s all? A notebook and a pencil?”

Mrs. English smiled. “And your imagination.”

When Zebra entered the art class the next Monday morning, he  
410 found about fifteen students there—including Andrea from his class with Mrs. English.

The walls of the room were bare. Everything had been removed for the summer. Zebra noticed two plastic bags on the floor beneath the blackboard.

He sat down at the desk next to Andrea’s.

She wore blue jeans and a yellow summer blouse with blue stripes. Her long red hair was tied behind her head with a dark-blue ribbon. She gazed at Zebra through her thick glasses, leaned over, and said, “Are you going to make gloomy drawings, too?”

Just then John Wilson walked in, carrying a plastic bag, which he put  
420 down on the floor next to the two others.

He stood alongside the front desk, wearing a light-blue long-sleeved shirt and jeans. The left shirtsleeve had been folded back and pinned to the shirt.

**M CHARACTER**

What does Mrs. English tell Zebra about Mr. Wilson?

4. **Matisse** (mə-tēs') (1869–1954): a French painter who was one of the best-known artists of the 20th century.



The dark-blue cap with the words LAND ROVER sat **jauntily** on his head.

“Good morning to you-all,” he said, with a shy smile. “Mighty glad you’re here. We’re going to do two things this summer. We’re going to make paper into faces and garbage into people. I can see by your expressions that you don’t know what I’m talking about, right? Well, I’m about to show you.”

He asked everyone to draw the face of someone sitting nearby.

430 Zebra hesitated, looked around, then made a drawing of Andrea. Andrea carefully drew Zebra.

He showed Andrea his drawing.

“It’s awful.” She **grimaced**. “I look like a mouse.”

Her drawing of him was good. But was his face really so sad? **N**

John Wilson went from desk to desk, peering intently at the drawings. He paused a long moment over Zebra’s drawing. Then he spent more than an hour demonstrating with chalk on the blackboard how they should not be thinking *eyes* or *lips* or *hands* while drawing, but should think only *lines* and *curves* and *shapes*; how they should be looking at  
440 where everything was situated in relation to the edge of the paper; and how they should not be looking *directly* at the edges of what they were drawing but at the space *outside* the edges.

**jauntily** (jɔn'tə-lē) *adv.*  
in a light and carefree way

**grimace** (grɪm'ɪs) *v.* to  
twist one’s face to show  
pain or disgust

**N CHARACTER**  
How does Andrea’s  
drawing affect Zebra?



Zebra stared in wonder at how fast John Wilson's hand raced across the blackboard, and at the empty sleeve rising and falling lightly against the shirt.

"You-all are going to learn how to *see* in a new way," John Wilson said.

They made another drawing of the same face.

"Now I look like a horse," Andrea said. "Are you going to add stripes?"

"You are one big pain, Andrea," Zebra said.

450 Shortly before noon, John Wilson laid out on his desk the contents of the plastic bags: a clutter of junked broken objects, including the doll and the umbrella.

Using strips of cloth, some lengths of string, crumpled newspaper, his pen, and his one hand, he swiftly transformed the battered doll into a red-nosed, umbrella-carrying clown, with baggy pants, a tattered coat, a derby hat, and a **somber** smile. Turning over the battered frying pan, he made it into a pedestal, on which he placed the clown.

**somber** (sŏm'bər) *adj.*  
serious; gloomy

"That's a sculpture," John Wilson said, with his shy smile. "Garbage into people."

460 The class burst into applause. The clown on the frying pan looked as if it might take a bow.

"You-all will be doing that, too, before we're done," John Wilson said. "Now I would like you to sign and date your drawings and give them to me."

When they returned the next morning the drawings were on a wall.

Gradually, in the days that followed, the walls began to fill with drawings. Sculptures made by the students were looked at with care, discussed by John Wilson and the class, and then placed on shelves along the walls: a miniature bicycle made of wire; a parrot made of an  
470 old sofa cushion; a cowboy made of rope and string; a fat lady made of a dented metal pitcher; a zebra made of glued-together scraps of cardboard.

"I like your zebra," Andrea said.

"Thanks," Zebra said. "I like your parrot."

One morning John Wilson asked the class members to make a contour drawing of their right or left hand. Zebra felt himself sweating and trembling as he worked.

"That's real nice," John Wilson said, when he saw Andrea's drawing.

He gazed at the drawing made by Zebra.

480 "You-all were looking at your hand," he said. "You ought to have been looking at the edge of your hand and at the space outside."

Zebra drew his hand again. Strange and ugly, the two fingers lay rigid and curled. But astonishingly, it looked like a hand this time.

One day, a few minutes before the end of class, John Wilson gave everyone an assignment: draw or make something at home, something very special that each person *felt deeply* about. And bring it to class.

Zebra remembered seeing a book titled *Incredible Cross-Sections* on a shelf in the family room at home. He found the book and took it into his room.

490 There was a color drawing of a rescue helicopter on one of the Contents pages. On pages 30 and 31, the helicopter was shown in pieces, its complicated insides displayed in detailed drawings. Rotor blades, control rods, electronics equipment, radar scanner, tail rotor, engine, lifeline, winch—all its many parts.

Zebra sat at his desk, gazing intently at the space outside the edges of the helicopter on the Contents page.

He made an outline drawing and brought it to class the next morning.

John Wilson looked at it. Was there a stiffening of his muscular neck, a sudden tensing of the hand that held the drawing?



500 He took the drawing and tacked it to the wall.

The next day he gave them all the same home assignment: draw or make something they *felt very deeply* about.

That afternoon, Zebra went rummaging through the trash bin in his kitchen and the garbage cans that stood near the back door of his home. He found some sardine cans, a broken eggbeater, pieces of cardboard, chipped buttons, bent bobby pins, and other odds and ends.

With the help of epoxy glue, he began to make of those bits of garbage a kind of helicopter. For support, he used his desktop, the floor, his knees, the elbow of his left arm, at one point even his chin. Struggling with the  
510 last piece—a button he wanted to position as a wheel—he realized that without thinking he had been using his left hand, and the two curled fingers had straightened slightly to his needs. ○

His heart beat thunderously. There had been so many hope-filled moments before, all of them ending in bitter disappointment. He would say nothing. Let the therapist or the doctors tell him. . . .

The following morning, he brought the helicopter to the class.

“Eewwww, what is *that*?” Andrea grimaced.

“Something to eat you with,” Zebra said.

“Get human, Zebra. Mr. Wilson will have a laughing fit over that.”

520 But John Wilson didn’t laugh. He held the helicopter in his hand a long moment, turning it this way and that, nodded at Zebra, and placed it on a windowsill, where it shimmered in the summer sunlight.

**T**he next day, John Wilson informed everyone that three students would be leaving the class at the end of July. He asked each of those students to make a drawing for him that he would get to keep. Something to remember them by. All their other drawings and sculptures they could take home.

Zebra lay awake a long time that night, staring into the darkness of his room. He could think of nothing to draw for John Wilson.

530 In the morning, he sat gazing out the classroom window at the sky and at the helicopter on the sill.

“What are you going to draw for him?” Andrea asked.

Zebra shrugged and said he didn’t know.

“Use your imagination,” she said. Then she said, “Wait, what am I seeing here? Are you able to move those fingers?”

“I think so.”

“You *think* so?”

“The doctors said there was some improvement.”

Her eyes glistened behind the thick lenses. She seemed genuinely happy. P

○ **CHARACTER**

What effect is John Wilson’s art class having on Zebra?

P **CHARACTER**

How have Andrea’s feelings toward Zebra changed?

540 He sat looking out the window. Dark birds wheeled and soared. There was the sound of traffic. The helicopter sat on the windowsill, its eggbeater rotor blades ready to move to full throttle.

Later that day, Zebra sat at his desk at home, working on a drawing. He held the large sheet of paper in place by pressing down on it with the palm and fingers of his left hand. He drew a landscape: hills and valleys, forests and flatlands, rivers and plateaus. Oddly, it all seemed to resemble a face.

Racing together over that landscape were a helicopter and a zebra.

It was all he could think to draw. It was not a very good drawing.

He signed it: “To John Wilson, with thanks. Zebra.” **Q**

550 The next morning, John Wilson looked at the drawing and asked Zebra to write on top of the name “John Wilson” the name “Leon.”

“He was an old buddy of mine, an artist. We were in Vietnam together. Would’ve been a much better artist than I’ll ever be.”

Zebra wrote in the new name.

“Thank you kindly,” John Wilson said, taking the drawing. “Zebra, you have yourself a good time in camp and a good life. It was real nice knowing you.”

He shook Zebra’s hand. How strong his fingers felt!

560 “I think I’m going to miss you a little,” Andrea said to Zebra after the class.

“I’ll only be away a month.”

“Can I help you carry some of those drawings?”

“Sure. I’ll carry the helicopter.”

**Z**ebra went off to a camp in the Adirondack Mountains.<sup>5</sup> He hiked and read and watched others playing ball. In the arts and crafts program he made some good drawings and even got to learn a little bit about watercolors. He put together clowns and airplanes and helicopters out of discarded cardboard and wood and clothing. From time to time his hand hurt, but the fingers seemed slowly to be coming back to life.

570 “Patience, young man,” the doctors told him when he returned to the city. “You’re getting there.”

One or two additional operations were still necessary. But there was no urgency. And he no longer needed the leg brace.

**O**n the first day of school, one of the secretaries found him in the hallway and told him to report to Mrs. English.

“Did you have a good summer?” Mrs. English asked.

“It was okay,” Zebra said.

**Q CHARACTER**

Why does Zebra thank John Wilson?

5. **Adirondack** (ăd’ə-rŏn’dăk’) **Mountains:** mountains covering a large area of northeast New York State.

“This came for you in the mail.”

She handed him a large brown envelope. It was addressed to Adam  
580 Zebra, Eighth Grade, at the school. The sender was John Wilson, with  
a return address in Virginia.

“Adam, I admit I’m very curious to see what’s inside,” Mrs. English said.  
She helped Zebra open the envelope.

Between two pieces of cardboard were a letter and a large color photograph.

The photograph showed John Wilson down on his right knee before a  
glistening dark wall. He wore his army jacket and blue jeans and boots,  
and the cap with the words LAND ROVER. Leaning against the wall to his  
right was Zebra’s drawing of the helicopter and the zebra racing together  
across a facelike landscape. The drawing was enclosed in a narrow frame.

590 The wall behind John Wilson seemed to glitter with a strange  
black light. **R**

Zebra read the letter and showed it to Mrs. English.

*Dear Zebra,*

*One of the people whose names are on this wall was among  
my very closest friends. He was an artist named Leon Kellner.  
Each year I visit him and leave a gift—something very special that  
someone creates and gives me. I leave it near his name for a few  
hours, and then I take it to my studio in Virginia, where I keep  
a collection of those gifts. All year long I work in my studio, but  
600 come summer I go looking for another gift to give him.*

*Thank you for your gift.*

*Your friend,  
John Wilson*

*P.S. I hope your hand is healing.*

Mrs. English stood staring awhile at the letter. She turned away  
and touched her eyes. Then she went to a shelf on the wall behind her,  
took down a large book, leafed through it quickly, found what she was  
searching for, and held it out for Zebra to see.

Zebra found himself looking at the glistening black wall of the  
610 Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. And at the names on it,  
the thousands of names. . . .

**L**ater, in the schoolyard during recess, Zebra stood alone at the chain-link  
fence and gazed down the street toward Franklin Avenue. He thought  
how strange it was that all the houses on this street had seemed to turn  
toward John Wilson that day, the windows and porches and columns  
and doors, as if saluting him.

Had that been only his imagination?

**R VISUALIZE**

Reread lines 585–592.  
Sketch the photo Zebra  
found in the envelope.



### ANALYZE VISUALS

Look carefully at this photograph. How do you think it was taken? What feelings was the photographer trying to show?

Maybe, Zebra thought, just maybe he could go for a walk to Franklin Avenue on Saturday or Sunday. He had not walked along Franklin Avenue since the accident; had not gone down that steep hill. Yes, he would walk carefully down that hill to the corner and walk back up and past the school and then the four blocks home.

Andrea came over to him.

“We didn’t get picked for the story class with Mrs. English,” she said. “I won’t have to listen to any more of your gloomy stories.”

Zebra said nothing.

“You know, I think I’ll walk home today instead of taking the school bus,” Andrea said.

“Actually, I think I’ll walk, too,” Zebra said. “I was thinking maybe I could pick up some really neat stuff in the street.”

“You are becoming a pleasant life form,” Andrea said.  **S**

### **S** CHARACTER

Reread lines 618–631. Why is it important for Zebra to walk along Franklin Avenue again?