

“Oranges”
by Gary Soto

(poem illustration here)

Analysis by Michelle Olson
Olson - Period 3

Oranges
By: Gary Soto

The first time I walked
With a girl, I was twelve,
Cold, and weighted down
With two oranges in my jacket.
December. Frost cracking 5
Beneath my steps, my breath
Before me, then gone,
As I walked toward
Her house, the one whose
Porch light burned yellow 10
Night and day, in any weather.
A dog barked at me, until
She came out pulling
At her gloves, face bright
With rouge. I smiled,
15
Touched her shoulder, and led
Her down the street, across
A used car lot and a line
Of newly planted trees,
Until we were breathing 20
Before a drugstore. We
Entered, the tiny bell
Bringing a saleslady
Down a narrow aisle of goods.
I turned to the candies 25
Tiered like bleachers,
And asked what she wanted -

Light in her eyes, a smile
Starting at the corners
Of her mouth. I fingered 30
A nickle in my pocket,
And when she lifted a chocolate
That cost a dime,
I didn't say anything.
I took the nickel from
35
My pocket, then an orange,
And set them quietly on
The counter. When I looked up,
The lady's eyes met mine,
And held them, knowing 40
Very well what it was all
About.

Outside,
A few cars hissing past,
Fog hanging like old 45
Coats between the trees.
I took my girl's hand
In mine for two blocks,
Then released it to let
Her unwrap the chocolate. 50
I peeled my orange
That was so bright against
The gray of December
That, from some distance,
Someone might have thought 55
I was making a fire in my hands.

Page 3 – Glossary

On this page, define any challenging vocabulary used in your poem.

Word	Part of Speech	Definition
Rouge	Noun	Red makeup for the face or lips
Tiered	Adj	Layered, leveled
Bleachers	Noun	Benches arranged in levels

If there is no challenging vocabulary, you must complete a second “enrichment activity” posted on page 9.

Page 4 - Why I Picked This Poem

In my opinion "Oranges" is a love poem. However, it is unlike most love poems. "Oranges" expresses and explains an innocent love of remembered youth. I picked this poem because I think the story it tells is endearing. I can relate to the speaker's feelings of nervousness and exhilaration, as he experiences his first "date." I especially enjoy the moment of compassion that comes at the end of the first stanza when the saleslady at the drugstore accepts the orange as payment. Because of Soto's use of imagery, I can imagine being outside on that cold December night.

Page 5 –Poetic Devices

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Page 6 - Poem Analysis

The poem “Oranges” by Gary Soto explains the power of young love. The poem describes one special day in the life of the speaker, a 12 year old boy out walking with a girl for the first time. The speaker’s memory is so vivid because of his feeling of a first

¹ Beneath, Before = alliteration using “B”

² “Face bright with rouge” simile

³ “Fog hanging like old coats between the trees” = simile

innocent love. He can recall his “weighted down” jacket, the “frost cracking,” the “burned yellow” of a porch light, and the “tiny bell” on a store’s entrance. Even years later, the speaker remembers these tiny details about the day because it was so important to him. Had it not been such an important and powerful memory, the speaker would not be able to describe it so vividly. Soto’s poem also demonstrates that young love is powerful because of the impact it has on others. In the poem, the speaker faces a dilemma when he does not have enough money to pay for the chocolate his companion chooses. Sensing his problem, the saleslady at the drugstore allows him to pay with a nickel and an orange. Soto’s speaker recalls “When I looked up,/ The lady’s eyes met mine,/ And held them, knowing/ Very well what it was all/ About.” Here, the saleslady recognizes the speaker’s problem and shows empathy. She is empathetic because she remembers what it is like to be young and in love. She is moved to accept the orange as payment because of the power of this innocent love. Soto’s “Oranges” demonstrates the strong impact that young love has on all who experience it.

Page 7 – Poet’s Biography

Gary Soto was born in April, 1952 in Fresno, California. As a young boy, he was not very interested in school and never thought he would become a poet. He took his first poetry class at the age of 20 at California State University. Most of his poetry is

autobiographical and shares stories of his childhood and growing up. He is heavily influenced by his Mexican-American upbringing. Soto has published many collections of poetry, including *The Elements of San Joaquin* and *The Tale of Sunlight*. He has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. He lives with his wife and daughter in Berkeley, California and teaches at the University of California at Riverside.

Page 8 - Describe the image you provided on the cover.

In order to represent "Oranges" by Gary Soto, I knew I had to include the two central figures of the poem - the young boy and girl. I've drawn them bundled in their winter attire, walking home from the drugstore. In the boy's hand is the orange that

remained after he used the other to “buy” the chocolate for the girl. The girl carries the chocolate. My hope is that their special moment in time is captured in this picture.

Page 9 - Enrichment Activities

If you liked “Oranges” by Gary Soto, check out these poems:

Evening on the Lawn by Gary Soto

I sat on the lawn watching the half-hearted moon
rise,

The gnats orbiting the peach pit that I spat out
When the sweetness was gone. I was twenty,
Wet behind the ears from my car wash job,
And suddenly rising to my feet when I saw in
early evening
A cloud roll over a section of stars.

It was boiling, a cloud
 Churning in one place and washing those three
 or four stars.
 Excited, I lay back down,
 My stomach a valley, my arms twined with new
 rope,
 My hair a youthful black. I called my mother and
 stepfather,
 And said something amazing was happening up
 there.
 They shaded their eyes from the porch light.
 They looked and looked before my mom turned
 The garden hose onto a rosebush and my
 stepfather scolded the cat
 To get the hell off the car. The old man grumbled
 About missing something on TV,
 The old lady made a face
 When mud splashed her slippers. How you
 bother,
 She said for the last time, the screen door
 closing like a sigh.
 I turned off the porch light, undid my shoes.
 The cloud boiled over those stars until it was
 burned by their icy fire.
 The night was now clear. The wind brought me a
 scent
 Of a place where I would go alone,
 Then find others, all barefoot.
 In time, each of us would boil clouds
 And strike our childhood houses
 With lightning.

"Reel One"
By Adrien Stoutenburg

It was all technicolor
 from bullets to nurses.

The guns gleamed like cars
 and blood was as red
 as the paint on dancers.
 The screen shook with fire

and my bones whistled.
 It was like life, but better.

I held my girl's hand,
 in the deepest parts,
 and we walked home, after,
 with the snow falling,
 but there wasn't much blue
 in the drifts or corners:
 just white and more white
 and the sound track so dead
 you could almost imagine
 the trees were talking.

First Love
BY JOHN CLARE

I ne'er was struck before that hour
 With love so sudden and so sweet,
 Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower
 And stole my heart away complete.
 My face turned pale as deadly pale,
 My legs refused to walk away,
 And when she looked, what could I ail?
 My life and all seemed turned to clay.

And then my blood rushed to my face
 And took my eyesight quite away,
 The trees and bushes round the place
 Seemed midnight at noonday.
 I could not see a single thing,
 Words from my eyes did start—
 They spoke as chords do from the string,
 And blood burnt round my heart.

Are flowers the winter's choice?
 Is love's bed always snow?
 She seemed to hear my silent voice,
 Not love's appeals to know.
 I never saw so sweet a face
 As that I stood before.
 My heart has left its dwelling-place
 And can return no more.

Works Cited

"Gary Soto" *Scholastic*. 2014. Web. 6 January 2014.

"Gary Soto" *The Poetry Foundation*. 2014. Web. 6 January 2014.

Soto, Gary. "Oranges." *Akoot*. 2004-2010. Web. 6 January 2014.