

Reading Questions for "Not Poor, Just Broke"

Writing Prompt: Think about a time when you realized someone pitied you or a time when you felt sorry for someone else. How did it make you feel? What caused the other person to feel this way? Why did you feel sorry for the other person? How did they respond? How did your self-worth or the other person's self-worth change because of the experience?

1. Why do you think the narrator is sure to mention that hate was something he learned at school, not home? Why does he then go on to describe his home life?
2. What does it mean to have a Helene Tucker? Have you had a negative experience with someone who continues to motivate you?
3. How does Helene motivate the narrator for 22 years? Why does she have that affect on him? Is there any benefit to Helene's face hanging in front of him for two decades? (See pgs. 113-114)
4. Discuss Gregory's diction (or word choice) in the 4th paragraph on pg. 114. With what is he pregnant? Why does this description work?
5. What kind of experience did the narrator have with his teacher? What does the teacher fail to see in the narrator? What reasons might the teacher have for this?

6. Why does Richard decide to “buy a daddy”? What do you think the teacher should have done? What other options did she have?

7. Are people more likely to try to impress those that judge them or rebel against them? Why?

8. How does Richard’s experience in the classroom affect his experiences everywhere else?

9. Is there any evidence in the story that the teacher feels something other than pity for and frustration with Richard? Where?

10. List at least three things which are shameful to Richard. Which seems to affect him the most?

11. The title of this story is “Not Poor, Just Broke.” What does that mean? Why is this an important distinction for the writer to make?