

# **“Oranges”**

By Gary Soto



Analysis by Randi Rosen  
Conbat - Period 1

## Page 2

### 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. 5  
December. Frost cracking  
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 nickel in my pocket,  
And when she lifted a chocolate  
That cost a dime,  
I didn't say anything.....

Oranges  
By Gary Soto

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With a girl, I was twelve,	
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Down a narrow aisle <sup>2</sup> of goods <sup>3</sup> .	
I turned to the candies	25
Tiered <sup>4</sup> like bleachers <sup>5</sup> ,	
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<sup>1</sup> Rouge – (noun) a red make-up used for lips or cheeks, (verb) to put this make-up on

<sup>2</sup> Aisle – (noun) a passage between shelves of goods in a supermarket or other building

<sup>3</sup> Goods – (noun) articles of trade, wares, merchandise

<sup>4</sup> Tier – (noun) a layer or level. (Used here as a verb, “tiered”)

<sup>5</sup> Bleachers – (noun) cheap bench seat at a sports arena

I didn't say anything.....

#### **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. My grandparents owned a drugstore and I can imagine one of them behind the counter being willing to trade the candy for the orange. I also like the cold weather and because of Soto’s use of imagery, I can imagine being outside on that chilly December evening.

## Page 5 –Poetic Devices

Oranges

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Line #s	Line/s from the poem	Poetic Device	Explanation
1 - 3	The first time I walked / With a girl, I was twelve, / Cold, and weighted down	Alliteration	The “W” sound is repeated in “walked”, “With”, and “weighted”
5	Frost cracking	Imagery	Sight of the cracks, Sound of the actual cracking, touch of the cold
22-23	The tiny bell / Bringing a saleslady	Personification	Bells don’t bring people. The sound of the bell got the woman’s attention.
25-26	candies / Tiered like bleachers	Simile	The candy is organized in levels (tiers) like bleachers, one on top of the next.
44	cars hissing past	Personification	Cars don’t hiss. A snake or a human might. Cars are

## 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 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 writer of poems, stories, and novels. However, he loved to read and read the classics as if he knew that being exposed to good literature would be important in his future. Most of his 11 books of poetry are autobiographical and share stories of his childhood and growing up. He is heavily influenced by his Mexican-American upbringing, although he now only speaks Spanish on occasion. He has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. He lives with in California and recently opened The Gary Soto Literary Museum at the Fresno City College.

## Page 8 – Cover Art Description



I chose the painting “La Promenade” by Pierre-Auguste Renoir in order to represent “Oranges” by Gary Soto. “La Promenade” basically means “the walk” in French. “Oranges” is essentially a poem about a couple taking a walk. Although the couple in the poem are younger and in a city setting in winter, the couple in the painting reminds me of them. The young man in the painting is kindly helping the young woman up a slight hill. He gently holds her hand, looking at her with a smile, as she walks cautiously in her long dress. The boy in “Oranges” also showed he cared by happily eating an orange instead of chocolate so that his “girl” could have the treat she desired. Both men show compassion for their partners.



**Page 9 – Creativity**



In this drawing, I (*really Phoebe- thank you, Phoebe*) chose to illustrate the boy just as he picked up the girl for their walk. Her house with its porchlight burning is in the background. The couple are wearing coats to show that it is cool outside. They are looking at each other happily because this is a positive poem about them going on a walk. I chose to mostly do the drawing in black and white because there isn't much color in the poem. It is a frosty December day and frost is

mostly colorless. However, there were a few colorful moments that Soto mentioned: her yellow porchlight, the rouge on her cheeks, and the bright oranges, of course.

## **Page 9 – Creativity**

Smitten

By Randi Rosen

The first time I walked  
with him it was a Tuesday night.  
I was fifteen, freezing. Peeking  
out from under my eyelids  
at him and my mom. In her  
purring car waiting. While  
I walked slowly,  
dodging the orange puddles of light  
from the streetlamps,  
wishing for more.

He held my hand. So what  
if it was through a wool mitten?  
His fingers were fire between us.  
An electric current pulling  
me towards him  
but I had to push  
myself away to enter  
my mom's impatient, but warm  
and purring car. Me-  
left wondering what  
Wednesday morning would bring.

In this poem, I (*really me, not Phoebe or anyone else*) started in Soto's style. I also copied his whole idea of young love and a couple walking in the cold. I included an impatient mom instead of a kind saleslady. I also hinted towards the future, where Soto did not. I included the color orange and fire, like Soto, but added some of my own images, too: the sound and warmth of the car, the puddles of light. I included many poetic devices: a lot of alliteration, hyperbole of fire

and electricity, personification of the purring car. My title is also a bit of a joke- smitten and mitten, whereas Soto's was not, just an important object.

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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.