

Before You Read

The Scholarship Jacket by Marta Salinas

LITERARY FOCUS: PLOT

The events that happen in a story make up its **plot**. The **exposition**, or introduction, of a story tells about the characters and their situation. The story's main character usually faces a **conflict**, a struggle to get what he or she wants. **Complications** arise as the character takes steps to resolve the conflict. The plot reaches a **climax** when we find out how the conflict is resolved. In the story's **resolution** loose ends are tied up as the story comes to a close.

Here's an example from a Chinese version of the Cinderella story that shows how plot elements fit together:

Sample Plot
Exposition (Characters and Basic Situation): Yeh-Shen lives with her stepmother and stepsister, who treat her badly and kill her only friend, a fish.
Major Problem or Conflict: The stepmother and stepsister go to the spring festival but make Yeh-Shen stay at home.
Major Plot Events: 1. A powerful spirit in the bones of her fish sends Yeh-Shen to the festival dressed in beautiful clothes. 2. She is admired at the festival, but when her stepmother looks at her, she rushes away and loses one of her tiny gold shoes. 3. The king is given the shoe as a gift and searches for its owner.
Climax: When Yeh-Shen puts on the shoe, she is again wearing the beautiful clothes, and the king falls in love with her.
Resolution: Yeh-Shen and the king are married.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Understand
plot.

**Reading
Skills**
Retell a story.

**Vocabulary
Skills**
Understand
the history of
English.

READING SKILLS: RETELLING

When you explain to a friend what happened to you yesterday, you are **retelling** what happened. You use the same skills when you retell a story. By retelling a story, you make sure you've understood the main plot events and their importance. As you read "The Scholarship Jacket," look for Retell notes. Then, use your own words to explain what happens to Marta.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

Before you read "The Scholarship Jacket," get to know these words from the story.

dismay (dis-mā') *n.*: fear; discouragement.

Marta feels dismay when the principal gives her bad news.

gaunt (gônt) *n.*: thin and bony.

The principal looks even taller than he really is because he is so gaunt.

muster (mus'tər) *v.*: gather together.

Marta tries to muster all the dignity she can.

vile (vīl) *adj.*: disgusting.

Marta tastes something bitter and vile in her mouth.

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: MIDDLE ENGLISH

English has not always been the same language you speak today. It developed over a long period of time. **Old English**, spoken from about 450 to 1066, combined the languages of the Britons, Anglo-Saxons, and Vikings. After William the Conqueror from France conquered England in 1066, many French words entered the language, creating **Middle English**. **Modern English** dates from about 1485, when printed books enabled English people to read, speak, and write the same language. The vocabulary words in the list above all come from Middle English. Study the chart below to see which of their meanings have changed over time.

Word	Middle English Word	Old Meaning	Current Meaning
dismay	<i>dismayen</i>	cause to lose power	cause fear or discouragement
muster	<i>musteren</i>	show	gather together
gaunt	<i>gawnte, gant</i>	slender, thin	thin and bony
vile	<i>vil</i>	cheap, base	disgusting

The Scholarship Jacket

Marta Salinas

IDENTIFY

Circle the description of the scholarship jacket in the first sentence. Underline the explanation of how a student wins the jacket.

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 14–19. Why do you think winning the scholarship jacket is important to Marta?

WORD STUDY

Underline the **context clues** in lines 20–23 that help you understand what *spring fever* is.

The small Texas school that I attended carried out a tradition every year during the eighth grade graduation; a beautiful gold and green jacket, the school colors, was awarded to the class valedictorian, the student who had maintained the highest grades for eight years. The scholarship jacket had a big gold S on the left front side and the winner's name was written in gold letters on the pocket.

My oldest sister Rosie had won the jacket a few years back and I fully expected to win also. I was fourteen and in
10 the eighth grade. I had been a straight A student since the first grade, and the last year I had looked forward to owning that jacket. My father was a farm laborer who couldn't earn enough money to feed eight children, so when I was six I was given to my grandparents to raise. We couldn't participate in sports at school because there were registration fees, uniform costs, and trips out of town; so even though we were quite agile and athletic, there would never be a sports school jacket for us. This one, the scholarship jacket, was our only chance.

20 In May, close to graduation, spring fever struck, and no one paid any attention in class; instead we stared out the windows and at each other, wanting to speed up the last few weeks of school. I despaired every time I looked in the mirror. Pencil thin, not a curve anywhere, I was called "Beanpole" and "String Bean" and I knew that's what I looked like.

"The Scholarship Jacket" by Marta Salinas from *Nosotras: Latina Literature Today*, edited by Maria del Carmen Boza, Beverly Silva, and Carmen Valle. Copyright © 1986 by Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

A flat chest, no hips, and a brain, that's what I had. That really isn't much for a fourteen-year-old to work with, I thought, as I absentmindedly wandered from my history class to the gym. Another hour of sweating in basketball and displaying my toothpick legs was coming up. Then I remembered my P.E. shorts were still in a bag under my desk where I'd forgotten them. I had to walk all the way back and get them. Coach Thompson was a real bear if anyone wasn't dressed for P.E. She had said I was a good forward and once she even tried to talk Grandma into letting me join the team. Grandma, of course, said no.

I was almost back at my classroom's door when I heard angry voices and arguing. I stopped. I didn't mean to eavesdrop; I just hesitated, not knowing what to do. I needed those shorts and I was going to be late, but I didn't want to interrupt an argument between my teachers. I recognized the voices: Mr. Schmidt, my history teacher, and Mr. Boone, my math teacher. They seemed to be arguing about me. I couldn't believe it. I still remember the shock that rooted me flat against the wall as if I were trying to blend in with the graffiti written there.

"I refuse to do it! I don't care who her father is, her grades don't even begin to compare to Martha's. I won't lie or falsify records. Martha has a straight A plus average and you know it." That was Mr. Schmidt and he sounded very angry. Mr. Boone's voice sounded calm and quiet.

"Look, Joann's father is not only on the Board, he owns the only store in town; we could say it was a close tie and—"

The pounding in my ears drowned out the rest of the words, only a word here and there filtered through. "... Martha is Mexican. ... resign. ... won't do it. ..." Mr. Schmidt came rushing out, and luckily for me went down

RETELL

Pause at line 40. Explain why Marta returns to her classroom and what she finds when she gets there.

IDENTIFY

Underline Mr. Boone's explanation in lines 53–54 of why he wants to give the jacket to Joann instead of to Marta.

PREDICT

Which girl do you think will get the jacket? Why?

RETELL

Re-read lines 60–68. Then, describe in your own words Marta's reaction to hearing her teachers' argument.

VOCABULARY

dismay (dis·mā') *n.*: fear; discouragement.

muster (mus'tər) *v.*: gather together.

INTERPRET

What is the **conflict**, or problem, between Marta and the school principal? Who deserves to get the jacket? Why?

60 the opposite way toward the auditorium, so he didn't see me. Shaking, I waited a few minutes and then went in and grabbed my bag and fled from the room. Mr. Boone looked up when I came in but didn't say anything. To this day I don't remember if I got in trouble in P.E. for being late or how I made it through the rest of the afternoon. I went home very sad and cried into my pillow that night so grandmother wouldn't hear me. It seemed a cruel coincidence that I had overheard that conversation.

70 The next day when the principal called me into his office, I knew what it would be about. He looked uncomfortable and unhappy. I decided I wasn't going to make it any easier for him so I looked him straight in the eye. He looked away and fidgeted with the papers on his desk.

"Martha," he said, "there's been a change in policy this year regarding the scholarship jacket. As you know, it has always been free." He cleared his throat and continued. "This year the Board decided to charge fifteen dollars—which still won't cover the complete cost of the jacket."

80 I stared at him in shock and a small sound of **dismay** escaped my throat. I hadn't expected this. He still avoided looking in my eyes.

"So if you are unable to pay the fifteen dollars for the jacket, it will be given to the next one in line."

Standing with all the dignity I could **muster**, I said, "I'll speak to my grandfather about it, sir, and let you know tomorrow." I cried on the walk home from the bus stop. The dirt road was a quarter of a mile from the highway, so by the time I got home, my eyes were red and puffy.

90 "Where's Grandpa?" I asked Grandma, looking down at the floor so she wouldn't ask me why I'd been crying. She was sewing on a quilt and didn't look up.

"I think he's out back working in the bean field."

I went outside and looked out at the fields. There he was. I could see him walking between the rows, his body bent over the little plants, hoe in hand. I walked slowly out to him, trying to think how I could best ask him for the money. There was a cool breeze blowing and a sweet smell of mesquite¹ in the air, but I didn't appreciate it. I kicked at a dirt clod. I wanted that jacket so much. It was more than just being a valedictorian and giving a little thank you speech for the jacket on graduation night. It represented eight years of hard work and expectation. I knew I had to be honest with Grandpa; it was my only chance. He saw me and looked up.

He waited for me to speak. I cleared my throat nervously and clasped my hands behind my back so he wouldn't see them shaking. "Grandpa, I have a big favor to



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1. **mesquite** (me-skēt') *n.*: small thorny tree with pleasant-smelling wood.

PREDICT

How do you think Grandpa will respond to Marta's request?

Notes

INTERPRET

Pause at line 131. Explain what both Marta and her grandfather realize about the meaning of the scholarship jacket. Why is the jacket "not a matter of money"?

INTERPRET

Pause at line 136. Why is Marta angry? How would you feel if you were in her position?

ask you," I said in Spanish, the only language he knew. He still waited silently. I tried again. "Grandpa, this year the principal said the scholarship jacket is not going to be free. It's going to cost fifteen dollars and I have to take the money in tomorrow, otherwise it'll be given to someone else." The last words came out in an eager rush. Grandpa straightened up tiredly and leaned his chin on the hoe handle. He looked out over the field that was filled with the tiny green bean plants. I waited, desperately hoping he'd say I could have the money.

He turned to me and asked quietly, "What does a scholarship jacket mean?"

I answered quickly; maybe there was a chance. "It means you've earned it by having the highest grades for eight years and that's why they're giving it to you." Too late I realized the significance of my words. Grandpa knew that I understood it was not a matter of money. It wasn't that. He went back to hoeing the weeds that sprang up between the delicate little bean plants. It was a time consuming job; sometimes the small shoots were right next to each other. Finally he spoke again.

"Then if you pay for it, Marta, it's not a scholarship jacket, is it? Tell your principal I will not pay the fifteen dollars."

I walked back to the house and locked myself in the bathroom for a long time. I was angry with grandfather even though I knew he was right, and I was angry with the Board, whoever they were. Why did they have to change the rules just when it was my turn to win the jacket?

It was a very sad and withdrawn girl who dragged into the principal's office the next day. This time he did look me in the eyes.

"What did your grandfather say?"

I sat very straight in my chair.

"He said to tell you he won't pay the fifteen dollars."

The principal muttered something I couldn't understand under his breath, and walked over to the window. He stood looking out at something outside. He looked bigger than usual when he stood up; he was a tall **gaunt** man with gray hair, and I watched the back of his head while I waited for him to speak.

150 "Why?" he finally asked. "Your grandfather has the money. Doesn't he own a small bean farm?"

I looked at him, forcing my eyes to stay dry. "He said if I had to pay for it, then it wouldn't be a scholarship jacket," I said and stood up to leave. "I guess you'll just have to give it to Joann." I hadn't meant to say that; it had just slipped out. I was almost to the door when he stopped me.

"Martha—wait."

160 I turned and looked at him, waiting. What did he want now? I could feel my heart pounding. Something bitter and **vile** tasting was coming up in my mouth; I was afraid I was going to be sick. I didn't need any sympathy speeches. He sighed loudly and went back to his big desk. He looked at me, biting his lip, as if thinking.

"Okay, we'll make an exception in your case. I'll tell the Board, you'll get your jacket."

170 I could hardly believe it. I spoke in a trembling rush. "Oh, thank you sir!" Suddenly I felt great. I didn't know about adrenalin² in those days, but I knew something was pumping through me, making me feel as tall as the sky. I wanted to yell, jump, run the mile, do something. I ran out so I could cry in the hall where there was no one to see me. At the end of the day, Mr. Schmidt winked at me and said, "I hear you're getting a scholarship jacket this year."

VOCABULARY

gaunt (gônt) *adj.*: thin and bony.

vile (vîl): *adj.*: disgusting.

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud. Then read it aloud again with expression. Try to make Marta's words sound as if she is about to cry. Notice that the principal sighs loudly. See if you can make his words sound as if he is sighing.

IDENTIFY

Underline the **climax** of the story—the moment that reveals how the conflict will turn out.

CLARIFY

Look back at the first paragraph of the story to review the rules for awarding the scholarship jacket. Is the principal really making "an exception" (line 163) in Marta's case? Explain.

[illegible]

Pause at line 176. If you were Marta, would you be happy? Explain why or why not.

Blank lined paper for writing.



Grandpa worked alongside me for a few minutes, but he didn't ask what had happened. After I had a little pile of weeds between the rows, I stood up and faced him.

Grandpa didn't say anything, he just gave me a pat on the shoulder and a smile. He pulled out the crumpled red handkerchief that he always carried in his back pocket and wiped the sweat off his forehead.

- 2. adrenalin** (ə·dren'ə·lin') *n.*: chemical released by the body during times of stress or excitement. It increases heart rate and muscular strength.

“Better go see if your grandmother needs any help with supper.”

I gave him a big grin. He didn't fool me. I skipped and ran back to the house whistling some silly tune.

MEET THE WRITER

Marta Salinas is a writer and farmworker activist. "The Scholarship Jacket" first appeared in *Cuentos Chicanos: A Short Story Anthology* and has been widely published and taught. In her writing and in her life, Salinas shows a concern for the challenges faced by farmworkers across the nation. Salinas is known for her research into the effects of toxic chemicals used on farmland. When her family and neighbors began having health problems, Salinas helped expose the effect of dangerous chemicals being used in her community of McFarland, California. In both her fictional characters and her environmental work, Salinas shows respect for the integrity, courage, and pride of those who work close to the land.

EXTEND

Suppose Marta had never overheard the conversation between her teachers, Mr. Boone and Mr. Schmidt. Suggest two other ways of ending this story.

Blank lined paper for writing.

The Scholarship Jacket

**SKILLS
FOCUS**

Literary Skills
Analyze plot.

Reading Skills
Retell a story's plot.

Plot Chart Several elements make up a story's plot. In the exposition we are introduced to the story's characters and the basic situation. We also learn of the main character's **conflict**, or struggle. At the story's **climax** we learn how the main character has succeeded in overcoming the conflict. In the **resolution** we learn what has become of the characters as the story ends.

The following chart contains an outline of a typical plot. Fill in the chart with details from "The Scholarship Jacket." Then, on a separate sheet of paper, **retell** the story's plot in your own words.

Exposition (Characters and Basic Situation):
Major Problem or Conflict:
Major Plot Events:
1.
2.
3. [Add as many as you need.]
Climax:
Resolution:

Skills Review

The Scholarship Jacket

VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

A. History of the English Language: Middle English Write the word from the Word Bank that comes from the Middle English word listed in the first column.

Middle English Origin	Middle English Meaning	Word Bank Word
<i>vil</i>	base	
<i>musteren</i>	show	
<i>dismayen</i>	cause to lose power	
<i>gawnte</i>	thin	

Word Bank

dismay
muster
gaunt
vile

B. Reading Comprehension Answer each question below.

1. Why does Marta live with her grandparents instead of her parents?

2. Why does Marta think she should win the scholarship jacket?

3. Why does Marta's grandfather refuse to pay for the jacket?

4. Why do you think the principal changes his mind about charging fifteen dollars for the scholarship jacket? _____

SKILLS
FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills
Understand the history of English.