RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond
1. Have you ever known anyone whose outlook on life resembles that of Lucinda Matlock or Fiddler Jones? Explain.

Recall and Interpret
2. (a) Describe how Lucinda Matlock spent her life. (b) What were her joys and her sorrows?
3. (a) Describe Lucinda's tone, or attitude toward her subject and audience, in lines 1–17. (b) How does her tone change in lines 18–22? What might you infer about her character from this change?
4. In lines 5–14 of "Fiddler Jones," Fiddler describes different ways of perceiving the same things. (a) Summarize these descriptions. (b) What point do you think he is trying to make?

5. (a) What reasons does Fiddler give for having neglected his farm? (b) How does he seem to feel about his work habits?

Analyze and Evaluate
6. (a) If you were to interview Lucinda Matlock, what questions might you ask her about facing life's ups and downs? (b) From your reading of the poem, what do you think her answers would be?
7. (a) What is Fiddler's philosophy of life? (b) What do you think of Fiddler's philosophy? Explain.

Connect
8. Big Idea Regionalism Both Lucinda Matlock and Fiddler Jones are from the same small Midwestern farming community. In your opinion, how might their philosophies be different if they had spent their lives in a busy city instead?

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Literary Element Dramatic Monologue
"Lucinda Matlock" and "Fiddler Jones" appear among a group of related dramatic monologues in Spoon River Anthology. The speakers all have something to say about their lives, and they want their audience—the living—to heed the lessons they have learned.

1. What general statement sums up the philosophy of life these two monologues share?
2. Paraphrase one of the dramatic monologues you have just read. Do you think this work would be as effective in prose as it is in poetry? Explain your response.

READING AND VOCABULARY

Reading Strategy Drawing Conclusions About Characters
As you answer the following questions, review the details about the speakers in "Lucinda Matlock" and "Fiddler Jones" that you noted in your charts.

1. Why does Lucinda Matlock disapprove of the younger generation?
2. What do you think was Fiddler Jones's greatest joy?

Vocabulary Practice
Practice with Antonyms Find the antonym for each vocabulary word listed in the first column.

1. repose a. shift
2. degenerate a. improved
3. ruinous a. redeeming

agitation b. fabricated
b. advantage

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EDGAR LEE MASTERS 503
The Outcasts of Poker Flat

MEET BRET HARTE

If U.S. newspapers of the early 1870s had featured bestseller lists, one name would have appeared regularly at the top: Bret Harte. Not only was he one of the most widely read writers in the United States at the time, but he was also the best paid. The $10,000 the Atlantic Monthly awarded him in 1871 for 12 stories per year was the highest figure ever paid to an American writer at that time. Harte wrote colorful, romantic stories about the American West. In many of his stories, he conjured the flavor and characters of the California Gold Rush long after it had ended.

Born in Albany, New York, Harte ventured west when he was eighteen years old. He worked as a drugstore clerk and a Wells Fargo guard, and, according to some accounts, he may have also tried teaching school and prospecting before he found lasting work in journalism. However, when he wrote an editorial condemning the massacre of sixty Native Americans by local white men, he so outraged readers that he had to quit his job as editor of the Northern Californian and leave town.

"The secret of the American short story was the treatment of characteristic American life, with absolute knowledge of its peculiarities."

—Bret Harte
"The Rise of the Short Story"

Literary Success While serving as editor of the Overland Monthly, a literary magazine, Harte wrote the story that made him famous, "The Luck of Roaring Camp." He followed that success with "The Outcasts of Poker Flat." Readers in the United States and England were eager for descriptions of California and the Wild West, and Harte gave them the stories they wanted. However, when the prestigious Boston literary magazine the Atlantic Monthly offered Harte a contract, the writer accepted the offer and left California for the East. He never returned west.

Personal and family problems prevented Harte from maintaining his early literary success. He served as a diplomat in Prussia and Scotland before returning to writing as his sole profession. In England, Harte found an enthusiastic audience for his work long after readers in the United States had grown tired of his literary formula. However, his health failed rapidly, and he died in 1902 of throat cancer.

Harte and the Wild West Harte was one of the principal shapers of the fictional Wild West that has had a wide influence in U.S. popular culture. In the 20th century, the makers of film and television "Westerns" found in Harte's stories the prototypes for many of their familiar stock characters. Such stereotypes as the grizzled prospector, the dance-hall girl with a heart of gold, and the smooth gambler all originated in Harte's fiction. Because these characters have become a fundamental part of U.S. popular culture, Harte's portrait of the West has endured.

Bret Harte was born in 1836 and died in 1902.

LiteratureOnline Author Search For more about Bret Harte, go to www.glencoe.com.
Connecting to the Story
To be outcast is to be driven out or rejected. In this story, the outcast characters are forced out of town with the threat of death should they return. As you read, think about the following questions:

- Why might a person be outcast from society?
- Can a person be an outcast without physically going somewhere else? Explain.

Building Background
Bret Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" is set in frontier California during the Gold Rush. The transformation of the West during the Gold Rush was rapid and spectacular. By the end of 1849, over 80,000 gold-seekers had come to California. Mining towns sprang up almost overnight. Drawn from all walks of life, the "Forty-Niners" created a rough, lawless, and sometimes violent world. Justice was spotty at best in these communities; the inhabitants themselves might take on the roles of judge, jury, and occasionally, executioner. Harte saw for himself the many types of people who were drawn to these communities. In his writing, he tried to look at these people with unblinking realism and to capture their peculiarities of speech and behavior.

Setting Purposes for Reading

Big Idea  Regionalism
As you read "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," notice how Harte introduces regional details into the setting.

Literary Element  Characterization
The methods a writer uses to reveal the personality of a character are called characterization. The writer may describe a character directly, or reveal a character's personality through his or her words, thoughts, and actions, and through the actions and reactions of other characters. As you read, look for direct statements about each character as well as action and dialogue that broaden your understanding of the characters' personalities.


Vocabulary

impropriety (im prà priˈtē) n. the quality of being improper; inappropriate behavior; p. 507
Newspapers accused the mayor of impropriety when he hired his relatives for city jobs.

malevolence (ma levˈə lans) n. a disposition to wish harm to others; ill will; p. 508
The bully's malevolence caused the other children to fear him.

equanimity (ə kwə nimˈə te, ekˈnətē) n. evenness of temper; calmness; p. 508
The teacher became known for her equanimity during disruptions.

hypothesis (hi pothˈə sis) n. an unproved explanation or assumption; p. 511
Sharon's hypothesis was that a tree branch was causing the strange tapping sounds.

seclusion (sə klooˈzhən) n. separation from others; isolation; p. 511
Seeking seclusion, the famous movie star shunned fans and reporters.

Vocabulary Tip: Denotation and Connotation
A word's denotation is its literal, or dictionary, meaning. A word's connotation, however, is the feeling or association the word suggests.
The Outcasts of Poker Flat

Bret Harte
As Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the 23d of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. Two or three men, conversing earnestly together, ceased as he approached, and exchanged significant glances. There was a Sabbath lull in the air, which, in a settlement unused to Sabbath influences, looked ominous.

Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of any predisposing cause was another question. "I reckon they're after somebody," he reflected; "likely it's me." He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was "after somebody." It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard of two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies. It is but due to the sex, however, to state that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment.

Mr. Oakhurst was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a possible example and a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets of the sums he had won from them. "It's agin' justice," said Jim Wheeler, "to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp—an entire stranger—carry away our money." But a crude sentiment of equity residing in the breasts of those who had been fortunate enough to win from Mr. Oakhurst overruled this narrower prejudice.

Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with philosophic calmness, none the less coolly that he was aware of the hesitation of his judges. He was too much of a gambler not to accept fate. With him life was at best an uncertain game, and he recognized the usual percentage in favor of the dealer.

A body of armed men accompanied the deported wickedness of Poker Flat to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, who was known to be a coolly desperate man, and for whose intimidation the armed escort was intended, the expatriated party consisted of a young woman familiarly known as "The Duchess," another who had won the title of "Mother Shipton;" and "Uncle Billy," a suspected sluicerobbler and confirmed drunkard. The cavalcade provoked no comments from the spectators, nor was any word uttered by the escort. Only when the gulch which marked the uttermost limit of Poker Flat was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

As the escort disappeared, their pent-up feelings found vent in a few hysterical tears from the Duchess, some bad language from Mother Shipton, and a Parthian volley of expletives from Uncle Billy. The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out, to the repeated statements of the

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1. A gulch is a small, narrow valley, especially one eroded by running water.

Reading Strategy  Making Generalizations Is Poker Flat ordinarily a very religious town? How can you tell?

Vocabulary  impropriety (im' pra prä'te) n. the quality of being improper; inappropriate behavior

Literary Element  Characterization Based on this description, how would you describe Oakhurst's view of life?
Duchess that she would die in the road, and to the alarming oaths that seemed to be bumped out of Uncle Billy as he rode forward. With the easy good humor characteristic of his class, he insisted upon exchanging his own riding-horse, “Five-Spot,” for the sorry mule which the Duchess rode. But even this act did not draw the party into any closer sympathy. The young woman readjusted her somewhat dragged plumes with a feebly, faded coquetry,\(^8\) Mother Shipton eyed the possessor of “Five-Spot” with malevolence, and Uncle Billy included the whole party in one sweeping anathema.\(^9\)

The road to Sandy Bar—a camp that, not having as yet experienced the regenerating influences of Poker Flat, consequently seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants—lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant a day’s severe travel. In that advanced season the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foothills into the dry, cold bracing air of the Sierras. The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon the Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted.

The spot was singularly wild and impressive. A wooded amphitheatre, surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley. It was, undoubtedly, the most suitable spot for a camp, had camping been advisable. But Mr. Oakhurst knew that scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished, and the party were not equipped or provisioned for delay. This fact he pointed out to his companions curtly, with a philosophic commentary on the folly of “throwing up their hand before the game was played out.” But they were furnished with liquor, which in this emergency stood them in place of food, fuel, rest, and prescience.\(^{10}\) In spite of his remonstrances, it was not long before they were more or less under its influence. Uncle Billy passed rapidly from a bellicose\(^{11}\) state into one of stupor, the Duchess became maudlin,\(^{12}\) and Mother Shipton snored. Mr. Oakhurst alone remained erect, leaning against a rock, calmly surveying them.

Mr. Oakhurst did not drink. It interfered with a profession which required coolness, impassiveness, and presence of mind, and, in his own language, he “couldn’t afford it.” As he gazed at his recumbent\(^{13}\) fellow exiles, the loneliness begotten of his pariah trade,\(^{14}\) his habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him. He bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits, and for a moment forgot his annoyance. The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiful companions never perhaps occurred to him. Yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity\(^{15}\) for which he was notorious. He looked at the gloomy walls that rose a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines around him, at the sky ominously clouded, at the valley below, already deepening into shadow; and, doing so, suddenly he heard his own name called.

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8. *Coquetry* (kōˈ trē) means “flirtation.”
9. *An anathema* (a nathˈ a ma) is a strong denunciation or a curse.

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10. *Prescience* (prēˈ shā ans) is foresight.
11. *Bellicose* (belˈ a kōs) means “showing an eagerness to fight” or “quarrelsome.”
14. *A pariah* (pə rēˈ) is an outcast, someone who is despised by others. *A pariah trade* is an occupation that is socially unacceptable.

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**Vocabulary**

- **Malevolence** (ma ˈ ev ə lans) n. a disposition to wish harm to others; ill will
- **Equanimity** (ekˈ wə nəmˈ ə tē) n. evenness of temper; calmness

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508 UNIT 4 REGIONALISM AND REALISM
A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh, open face of the newcomer Mr. Oakhurst recognized Tom Simson, otherwise known as “The Innocent,” of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a “little game,” and had, with perfect equanimity, won the entire fortune—amounting to some forty dollars—of that guileless youth. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door and thus addressed him: “Tommy, you’re a good little man, but you can’t gamble worth a cent. Don’t try it over again.” He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted slave of Tom Simson.

There was a remembrance of this in his boyish and enthusiastic greeting of Mr. Oakhurst. He had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune. “Alone?” No, not exactly alone; in fact (a giggle), he had run away with Piney Woods. Didn’t Mr. Oakhurst remember Piney? She that used to wait on the table at the Temperance House? They had been engaged a long time, but old Jake Woods had objected, and so they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were. And they were tired out, and how lucky it was they had found a place to camp, and company. All this the Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged from behind the pine-tree, where she had been blushing unseen, and rode to the side of her lover.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate. He retained, however, his presence of mind sufficiently to kick Uncle Billy, who was about to say something, and Uncle Billy was sober enough to recognize in Mr. Oakhurst’s kick a superior power that would not bear trifling. He then endeavored to dissuade Tom Simson from delaying further, but in vain. He even pointed out the fact that there was no provision, nor means of making a camp. But, unluckily, the Innocent met this objection by assuring the party that he was provided with an extra mule loaded with provisions, and by the discovery of a rude attempt at a log house near the trail. “Piney can stay with Mrs. Oakhurst,” said the Innocent, pointing to the Duchess, “and I can shift for myself.”

Nothing but Mr. Oakhurst’s admonishing foot saved Uncle Billy from bursting into a roar of laughter. As it was, he felt compelled

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**Literary Element** Characterization **What does this sentence reveal about Oakhurst’s character? What does it reveal about Tom’s character?**

15. Here, trifling means “joking” or “mocking.”
to retire up the cañon until he could recover his gravity. There he confided the joke to the tall pine-trees, with many slaps of his leg, contortions of his face, and the usual profanity. But when he returned to the party, he found them seated by a fire—for the air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast—in apparently amicable conversation. Piney was actually talking in an impulsive girlish fashion to the Duchess, who was listening with an interest and animation she had not shown for many days. The Innocent was holding forth, apparently with equal effect, to Mr. Oakhurst and Mother Shipton, who was actually relaxing into amiability. “Is this yer a d—d picnic?” said Uncle Billy, with inward scorn, as he surveyed the sylvan group, the glancing fire-light, and the tethered animals in the foreground. Suddenly an idea mingled with the alcoholic fumes that disturbed his brain. It was apparently of a jocular nature, for he felt impelled to slap his leg again and cram his fist into his mouth.

As the shadows crept slowly up the mountain, a slight breeze rocked the tops of the pine-trees and moaned through their long and gloomy aisles. The ruined cabin, patched and covered with pine boughs, was set apart for the ladies. As the lovers parted, they unaffectedly exchanged a kiss, so honest and sincere that it might have been heard above the swaying pines. The frail Duchess and the malevolent Mother Shipton were probably too stunned to remark upon this last evidence of simplicity, and so turned without a word to the hut. The fire was replenished, the men lay down before the door, and in a few minutes were asleep.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it,—snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain, and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered—they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

The momentary excitement brought Mr. Oakhurst back to the fire with his usual calm. He did not waken the sleepers. The Innocent slumbered peacefully, with a smile on his good-humored, freckled face; the virgin Piney slept beside her frailest sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians; and Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his mustaches and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a whirling mist of snowflakes that dazzled and confused the eye. What could be seen of the landscape appeared magically changed. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words, “Snowed in!”

A careful inventory of the provisions, which, fortunately for the party, had been stored within the hut, and so escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that with care and prudence they might last ten days longer. “That is,” said Mr. Oakhurst sotto voce to the Innocent, “if you’re willing to board us. If you ain’t—and perhaps you’d better not—you can wait till Uncle Billy gets back with provisions.”

16. cañon (kā nyō̊n') is Spanish for canyon.
17. sylvan means “situated in the woods.”
18. jocular means “humorous.”

Big Idea Regionalism In Uncle Billy’s behavior, what might Harte be suggesting about the regional characteristics of the West?
For some occult\(^1\) reason, Mr. Oakhurst could not bring himself to disclose Uncle Billy's rascality, and so offered the hypothesis that he had wandered from the camp and had accidentally stampeded the animals. He dropped a warning to the Duchess and Mother Shipton, who of course knew the facts of their associate's defection. "They'll find out the truth about us all when they find out anything," he added significantly, "and there's no good frightening them now."

Tom Simson not only put all his worldly store at the disposal of Mr. Oakhurst, but seemed to enjoy the prospect of their enforced seclusion. "We'll have a good camp for a week, and then the snow'll melt, and we'll all go back together." The cheerful gayety of the young man and Mr. Oakhurst's calm infected the others. The Innocent, with the aid of pine boughs, extemporized\(^2\) a thatch for the roofless cabin, and the Duchess directed Piney in the rearrangement of the interior with a taste and tact that opened the blue eyes of that provincial maiden to their fullest extent. "I reckon now you're used to fine things at Poker Flat," said Piney. The Duchess turned away sharply to conceal something that reddened her cheeks through their professional tint, and Mother Shipton requested Piney not to "chatter." But when Mr. Oakhurst returned from a weary search for the trail, he heard the sound of happy laughter echoed from the rocks. He

\(^{21}\) Occult means "mysterious."

\[^{22}\] Extemporized means "made without preparation" or "improvised."

Literary Element Characterization On what evidence does Piney likely base this statement? What does it reveal about her character?
stopped in some alarm, and his thoughts first naturally reverted to the whiskey, which he had prudently cachéd. “And yet it don’t somehow sound like whiskey,” said the gambler. It was not until he caught sight of the blazing fire through the still blinding storm, and the group around it, that he settled to the conviction that it was “square fun.”

Whether Mr. Oakhurst had cachéd his cards with the whiskey as something debarred the free access of the community, I cannot say. It was certain that, in Mother Shipton’s words, he “didn’t say ‘cards’ once” during that evening. Haply the time was beguiled by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. Notwithstanding some difficulties attending the manipulation of this instrument, Piney Woods managed to pluck several reluctant melodies from its keys, to an accompaniment by the Innocent on a pair of bone castanets. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp-meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation. I fear that a certain defiant tone and Covenanter’s swing to its chorus, rather than any devotional quality, caused it speedily to infect the others, who at last joined in the refrain:

“I’m proud to live in the service of the Lord, And I’m bound to die in His army.”

The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled above the miserable group, and the flames of their altar leaped heavenward, as if in token of the vow.

At midnight the storm abated, the rolling clouds parted, and the stars glittered keenly above the sleeping camp. Mr. Oakhurst, whose professional habits had enabled him to live on the smallest possible amount of sleep, in dividing the watch with Tom Simson somehow managed to take upon himself the greater part of that duty. He excused himself to the Innocent by saying that he had “often been a week without sleep.” “Doing what?” asked Tom. “Poker!” replied Oakhurst sententiously. “When a man gets a streak of luck, he don’t get tired. The luck gives in first. Luck,” continued the gambler reflectively, “is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it’s bound to change. And it’s finding out when it’s going to change that makes you. We’ve had a streak of bad luck since we left Poker Flat,—you came along, and slap you get into it, too. If you can hold your cards right along you’re all right. For,” added the gambler, with cheerful irrelevance—

“I’m proud to live in the service of the Lord, And I’m bound to die in His army.”

The third day came, and the sun, looking through the white-curtained valley, saw the outcasts divide their slowly decreasing store of provisions for the morning meal. It was one of the peculiarities of that mountain climate that its rays diffused a kindly warmth over the wintry landscape, as if in regretful commiseration of the past. But it revealed drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut,—a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still clung. Through the marvelously clear air the smoke of the pastoral28 village of Poker Flat rose miles away. Mother Shipton saw it, and from a remote pinnacle of her rocky fastness hurls in that direction a final malediction.29 It was her last vituperative26 attempt, and perhaps for that reason was invested with a certain degree

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23. Cachéd (kasht) means “hidden.”
24. Here, rude means “vigorous” or “robust.”
25. A camp-meeting is an outdoor religious gathering.
26. Covenanter’s swing implies a lively rhythm. The Covenanters were Scottish Presbyterians who made covenants, or agreements, to resist rule by the Church of England.
27. Sententiously (sen ten’shə shən) means “in a concise, energetic manner.”
28. Pastoral means “of, or relating to, rural life.”
29. A malediction (mə’ lə dik’shən) is a curse.
30. Vituperative (vi tər’ pə rā’ tiv) means “characterized by abusive language and harsh criticism.”
of sublimity. It did her good, she privately informed the Duchess. "Just you go out there and cuss, and see." She then set herself to the task of amusing "the child," as she and the Duchess were pleased to call Piney. Piney was no chicken, but it was a soothing and original theory of the pair thus to account for the fact that she didn't swear and wasn't improper.

When night crept up again through the gorges, the reedy notes of the accordion rose and fell in fitful spasms and long-drawn gasps by the flickering campfire. But music failed to fill entirely the aching void left by insufficient food, and a new diversion was proposed by Piney,—story-telling. Neither Mr. Oakhurst nor his female companions caring to relate their personal experiences, this plan would have failed too, but for the Innocent. Some months before he had chanced upon a stray copy of Mr. Pope's\textsuperscript{31} ingenious translation of the \emph{Iliad}.\textsuperscript{32} He now proposed to narrate the principal incidents of that poem,—having thoroughly mastered the argument and fairly forgotten the words,—in the current vernacular of Sandy Bar. And so for the rest of that night the Homeric demi-gods again walked the earth. Trojan bully and wily Greek wrestled in the winds, and the great pines in the cañon seemed to bow to the wrath of the son of Peleus.\textsuperscript{33} Mr. Oakhurst listened with quiet satisfaction. Most especially was he interested in the fate of "Ashheels," as the Innocent persisted in denoting the "swift-footed Achilles."

So, with small food and much of Homer and the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snowflakes were sifted over the land. Day by day closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half hidden in the drifts. And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other's eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton,—once the strongest of the party—seemed to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side. "I'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous\textsuperscript{34} weakness, "but don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head, and open it." Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched. "Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. "You've starved yourself," said the gambler. "That's what they call it," said the woman querulously, as she lay down again, and turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and Homer was forgotten. When the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took the Innocent aside, and showed him a pair of snowshoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack-saddle. "There's one chance in a hundred to save her yet," he said, pointing to Piney; "but it's there," he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. "If you can reach there in two days she's safe." "And you?" asked Tom Simson. "I'll stay here," was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace. "You are not going, too?" said the Duchess, as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him. "As far as the cañon," he replied. He turned suddenly and kissed the Duchess, leaving her pallid\textsuperscript{35} face aflame, and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then the Duchess, feeding the fire,
found that some one had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking into each other’s faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke, but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around the Duchess’s waist. They kept this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rendering asunder the protecting vines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, which gradually died away. As the embers slowly blackened, the Duchess crept closer to Piney, and broke the silence of many hours: “Piney, can you pray?” “No, dear,” said Piney simply. The Duchess, without knowing exactly why, felt relieved, and, putting her head upon Piney’s shoulder, spoke no more. And so reclining, the younger and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep.

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Featherly drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine boughs, flew like white winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon through the rifted clouds looked down upon what had been the camp. But all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.

They slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognized this, and turned away, leaving them still locked in each other’s arms.

But at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine-trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie-knife.

It bore the following, written in pencil in a firm hand:

†

BENEATH THIS TREE LIES THE BODY OF

JOHN OAKHURST,

WHO STRUCK A STREAK OF BAD LUCK ON THE 23RD OF NOVEMBER 1850, AND

HANDED IN HIS CHECKS ON THE 7TH DECEMBER, 1850. †

And pulseless and cold, with a derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

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36. The deuce of clubs is the two of clubs. In a deck of cards, it has the lowest value.

**Literary Element Characterization** Why does the narrator describe Oakhurst as “at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat”? 

514  UNIT 4  REGIONALISM AND REALISM
RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond
1. (a) Did the ending of the story surprise you? Why or why not? (b) Did the ending seem appropriate? Support your answer.

Recall and Interpret
2. (a) What has the secret committee of Poker Flat decided to do? Why? (b) What can you infer about the outcasts based on the committee's decision?
3. (a) Summarize what happens during the outcasts' second day in camp. (b) What do you learn about each of the characters, based on their behavior?
4. (a) When the searchers from Poker Flat arrive at the camp, what do they find? (b) How would you compare their treatment of the outcasts at the end of the story to their treatment at the beginning?

Analyze and Evaluate
5. (a) What is the narrator's tone, or attitude, toward the outcasts? (b) What words or phrases convey this tone?
6. (a) Which character from the story do you admire the most? Support your answer with examples from the text. (b) Which do you admire the least? Why?
7. (a) In your opinion, what message, or lesson, does this story convey? (b) How effectively does Harte convey this message?

Connect
8. Big Idea Regionalism Setting is considered integral when a story could not take place in another time and place. How does the setting—both time and place—influence the actions of the characters in this story?

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Literary Element Characterization
A character's personality can be revealed in many ways. The simplest method is direct characterization. Using this method, the writer makes explicit statements about a character. "Mr. Oakhurst was a coolly desperate man" is an example of direct characterization. The writer may prefer, however, for the reader to infer certain aspects of a character's personality. This method is called indirect characterization. There are many ways a writer can use indirect characterization. Physical descriptions, the character's words and actions, reactions from other characters, and even a character's name can reveal something about his or her personality.

1. How would you describe Tom Simson's character? Give two examples from the story of how his character is revealed.
2. Give an example of Mother Shipton's character from the beginning of the story. How does her final action reveal a change in her character? Explain.

Review: Motivation
Motivation is the stated or implied reason or cause for a character's actions.

Partner Activity Meet with another classmate and discuss John Oakhurst's motivations throughout the story. Working with your partner, create a chart listing Oakhurst's most important actions in the left column. In the right column, fill in what you think his motivations are for these actions. When you have completed this chart, examine it to see whether you can make a generalization about the motivations for his actions.
Reading Strategy  Making Generalizations

Readers make generalizations by looking at details and noticing what they have in common. Review the chart you created on page 505 for details and generalizations about characters and setting.

1. Based on this story, what overall generalization can you make about Harte's characters?

2. What overall generalization can you make about Harte's use of setting?

Vocabulary  Practice

Practice with Denotation and Connotation

Mr. Oakhurst, one of the "outcasts," is also described as a member of a "pariah trade." The words outcast and pariah have similar denotations, or literal meanings. However, pariah has much stronger negative connotations than outcast, suggesting a person who is not only rejected but despised. Each of the following pairs of words has similar denotations. In each pair, decide which word has stronger negative connotations.

1. a. impropriety    b. misstep
2. a. malevolence    b. grudge
3. a. equanimity     b. callousness
4. a. hypothesis     b. guess
5. a. seclusion      b. isolation

Academic Vocabulary

Here are two words from the vocabulary list on page R86. These words will help you think, write, and talk about the selection.

aggregate (ag'ər gät) n. a whole composed of individual parts; sum total
external (ikst turn'al) adj. related to, of, or situated on the outside; superficial

Practice and Apply

1. What circumstance had been experienced by each individual in the aggregate of outcasts?
2. What external causes contributed to the outcasts' demise?

Writing About Literature

Apply Form In the story, Poker Flat does not have a town sheriff. If it did, however, imagine what the sheriff would have thought when Tom Simson, looking half-frozen and utterly exhausted, stumbled into town on a December afternoon in 1850 and asked for help.

Write an incident report based on the information Tom would have given the sheriff. To get started, remember that an incident report is a type of summary. When you summarize, you state the main ideas or events in your own words. To summarize an incident, you need to answer the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how. In answering the question why, include what is known about the outcasts' departure from Poker Flat.

Use a chart to jot down your responses:

Who was involved?
What happened?
When did it happen?
Where did it happen?
Why did it happen?
How did it happen?

As you revise your report, make sure it starts with a strong introductory sentence that presents the most important information. Organize the details in decreasing order of importance. And remember to present only the facts and to avoid expressing personal opinions.

Literary Criticism

Group Discussion Critic Arthur Inkersley noted in his 1897 article "Californian Literature" that Bret Harte "grew too big for his environment, and left California. . . . Though his present address is . . . London, his inspiration is still drawn from the . . . Pacific Coast." With a small group, discuss whether you think that an author needs to be in a specific setting in order to portray it. What benefits are there to writing about the place you are physically in? What are some benefits of writing about a place in your memory?

Literature Online  Web Activities For eFlashcards, Selection Quick Checks, and other Web activities, go to www.glencoe.com.