

Before You Read

Have you ever attended an elementary school in which you had the same teacher for every subject? If you did, you know that you were with that one person a long time—approximately fourteen hundred hours a year. A teacher, especially one who is with a student for so long, can have a great deal of influence. Think of the best teacher you've ever had. What qualities and actions made this teacher special? As you read, ask yourself whether your favorite teacher was anything like the teachers in "Miss Awful."

Miss Awful

Arthur Cavanaugh

The whole episode of Miss Awful began for the Clarks at their dinner table one Sunday afternoon. Young Roger Clark was explaining why he could go to Central Park with his father instead of staying home to finish his homework—Miss Wilson, his teacher, wouldn't be at school tomorrow, so who'd know the difference? "She has to take care of a crisis," Roger explained. "It's in Omaha." ❶

"What is?" his older sister, Elizabeth, inquired. "For a kid in third grade, Roger, you talk dopey. You fail to make sense."

Roger ignored the insult. His sister was a condition of life he had learned to live with, like lions. Or snakes. Poisonous ones. Teetering,¹ as always, on the tilted-back chair, feet wrapped around the legs, he continued, "Till Miss Wilson gets back we're having some other teacher. She flew to Omaha yesterday." He pushed some peas around on his plate and was silent a moment. "I hope her plane don't crash," he said.

Roger's mother patted his hand. A lively, outgoing youngster, as noisy and rambunctious² as any eight-year-old, he had another side to him, tender and soft, which worried about people. Let the blind man who sold pencils outside the five-and-ten on Broadway be absent from his post, and Roger worried that catastrophe had overtaken him. When Mrs. Loomis, a neighbor of the Clarks in the

1. teetering *v. used as adj.*: wobbling, as if about to fall.

2. rambunctious *adj.*: noisy and lively.

IDENTIFY

❶ Why does Roger decide he does not have to do his homework?



Tribute to the American Working People (detail of five-part painting) by Honoré Desmond Sharrer.

National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C./Art Resource, NY.

IDENTIFY

2 What does the narrator tell you directly about Roger's character?

Greenwich Village brownstone, had entered the hospital, Roger's anxious queries had not ceased until she was discharged.³ And recently there was the cat which had nested in the downstairs doorway at night. Roger had carried down saucers of milk, clucking with concern. "Is the cat run away? Don't it have a home?"²

Virginia Clark assured her son, "You'll have Miss Wilson safely back before you know it. It's nice that you care so."

Roger beamed with relief. "Well, I like Miss Wilson, she's fun. Last week, for instance, when Tommy Miller got tired of staying in his seat and lay down on the floor—"

"He did what?" Roger's father was roused from his post-dinner torpor.⁴

"Sure. Pretty soon the whole class was lying down. Know what

3. discharged *v.*: released: here, from the hospital.

4. torpor (tôr'pər) *n.*: sluggishness.

