

**WEEK 1**

**Readings**

**Augusto Monterroso (b. Honduras, Guatemala), “The Frog Who Wanted to Be an Authentic Frog,” “The Eclipse” (1959)**

**Marco Denevi (Argentina), “The Lord of the Flies,” “Apocalypse” (1966)**

**Stephen Leacock (Canada), “Borrowing a Match” (1910)**

**Langston Hughes (United States), “Thank You, M’am” (1958)**



**Augusto Monterroso (1921-2003; Honduras/Guatemala) was known for his wit and the brevity of many of his stories.**

**Augusto Monterroso, “The Frog Who Wanted to Be an Authentic Frog”**

There was once a frog who wanted to be a real frog, and every day she struggled to be so. First she bought a mirror into which she gazed for hours hoping to see her longed-for authenticity. Sometimes she thought she’d found it and sometimes she did not, depending on the mood of that day or hour, until she grew tired of this and put the mirror away in a trunk.

Finally she thought that the only way to be sure of her own worth was through the opinion of others, and she began to do her hair and to dress up and undress (when she had no other option) to see if others approved of her and recognized that she was a real frog.

One day she noticed that what they most admired about her was her body, especially her legs, so she started to do squats and jumps in order to have to better legs, and she felt that everyone applauded her.

And so she continued to push herself harder and harder, and was willing to go to any length to get others to consider her to be a real frog, she even allowed her thighs to be ripped off for others to eat, and as the others devoured them she was still able to hear bitterly when they said, “Excellent frog. Tastes just like chicken.”

(Translated by John Lyons)

1. What is the message of this story?
2. How is the message conveyed?
3. How does the story compare to an Aesop fable?

### **Augusto Monterroso, “The Eclipse”**

When Brother Bartolomé Arrazola felt that he was lost, he accepted the fact that now nothing could save him. The powerful jungle of Guatemala, implacable and final, had overwhelmed him. In the face of his topographical ignorance, he sat down calmly to wait for death. He wanted to die there, without hope, alone, his thoughts fixed on distant Spain, particularly on the Convent of Los Abrojos, where Charles V had once condescended to come down from his eminence to tell him that he trusted in the religious zeal of his work of redemption. When he awoke, he found himself surrounded by a group of Indians with impassive faces who were preparing to sacrifice him before an altar, an altar that seemed to Bartolomé the bed on which he would finally rest from his fears, from his destiny, from himself. Three years in the country had given him a passing knowledge of the native languages. He tried something. He spoke a few words that were understood. Then there blossomed in him an idea that he considered worthy of his talent and his broad education and his profound knowledge of Aristotle. He remembered that a total eclipse of the sun was to take place that day. And he decided, in the deepest part of his being, to use that knowledge to deceive his oppressors and save his life.

“If you kill me,” he said, “I can make the sun darken on high.” The Indians stared at him and Bartolomé caught the disbelief in their eyes. He saw them consult one another and he waited confidently, not without a certain contempt.

Two hours later the heart of Brother Bartolomé Arrazola spurted out its passionate blood on the sacrificing stone (brilliant in the opaque light of the eclipsed sun) while one of the Indians recited tonelessly, slowly, one by one, the infinite list of dates when solar and lunar eclipses would take place, which the astronomers of the Mayan community had predicted and registered in their codices without the estimable help of Aristotle. (Translated by Edith Grossman)

1. What is the narrator’s style in this story?
2. What is the message here?
3. How does the story present its argument?

**Marco Denevi (1922-1998; Argentina) was a lawyer, journalist and short story writer.**

**Marco Denevi, “The Lord of the Flies”**

**T**he flies imagined their god. It was also a fly. The lord of the flies was a fly, now green, now black and gold, now pink, now white, now purple, an inconceivable fly, a beautiful fly, a monstrous fly, a terrible fly, a benevolent fly, a vengeful fly, a just fly, a youthful fly, but always a fly. Some embellished his size so that he was compared to an ox, others imagined him to be so small that you couldn’t see him. In some religions, he was missing wings (“He flies,” they argued, “but he doesn’t need wings.”) while in others he had infinite wings. Here it was said he had antennae like horns, and there that he had eyes that surrounded his entire head. For some he buzzed constantly, and for others he was mute, but he could communicate just the same. And for everyone, when flies died, he took them up to paradise. Paradise was a hunk of rotten meat, stinking and putrid, that souls of the dead flies could gnaw on for an eternity without devouring it; yes, this heavenly scrap of refuse would be constantly reborn and regenerated under the swarm of flies. For the good flies. Because there were also bad flies, and for them

there was a hell. The hell for condemned flies was a place without excrement, without waste, trash, stink, without anything of anything; a place sparkling with cleanliness and illuminated by a bright white light; in other words, an ungodly place.

1. What is this story about?
2. Is there are overriding theme?
3. How does the author employ symbolism?

### **Marco Denevi, “Apocalypse”**

The extinction of the human race took place, approximately, by the late thirty-second century. It happened like this: The machines had reached such perfection that men and women did not need to eat or to sleep, to talk or to read, to write or to think... or to do anything. They only had to press a button and the machines did everything for them. Gradually, things started to disappear... tables, chairs, roses, disks with the nine symphonies of Beethoven, antique shops, the wines from Bordeaux, Flemish tapestries, all of Verdi's operas , chess, telescopes, Gothic cathedrals, football stadiums, the *Pietà* of Michelangelo, the ruins of Trajan's Forum, automobiles, rice, giant sequoias, the Parthenon. There were only machines. Then, in August, people began to notice they too were gradually disappearing ... while the machines were multiplying. It didn't take long for the number of men to become less than half while the machines doubled. The machines eventually occupied all available spaces. ... No one could take a step or make a gesture without tripping over them. Finally, human beings were eliminated. As they forgot to unplug the machines, we continue to operate.

1. What is the most striking feature of this story?
2. What are the major stylistic elements of the story? That is, how is it constructed?
3. Is the theme of the story viable for the twenty-first century?

**Stephen Leacock (1869-1944) was a Canadian teacher, political scientist, writer, and humorist.**

### **Stephen Leacock, "Borrowing a Match"**

You might think that borrowing a match upon the street is a simple thing. But any man who has ever tried it will assure you that it is not, and will be prepared to swear to the truth of my experience of the other evening.

I was standing on the corner of the street with a cigar that I wanted to light. I had no match. I waited till a decent, ordinary-looking man came along. Then I said:

"Excuse me, sir, but could you oblige me with the loan of a match?"

"A match?" he said, "why certainly." Then he unbuttoned his overcoat and put his hand in the pocket of his waistcoat. "I know I have one," he went on, "and I'd almost swear it's in the bottom pocket—or, hold on, though, I guess it may be in the top—just wait till I put these parcels down on the sidewalk."

"Oh, don't trouble," I said, "it's really of no consequence."

"Oh, it's no trouble, I'll have it in a minute; I know there must be one in here somewhere"—he was digging his fingers into his pockets as he spoke—"but you see this isn't the waistcoat I generally..."

I saw that the man was getting excited about it. "Well, never mind," I protested; "if that isn't the waistcoat that you generally—why, it doesn't matter."

"Hold on, now, hold on!" the man said, "I've got one of the cursed things in here somewhere. I guess it must be in with my watch. No, it's not there either. Wait till I try my coat. If that confounded tailor only knew enough to make a pocket so that a man could get at it!"

He was getting pretty well worked up now. He had thrown down his walking-stick and was plunging at his pockets with his teeth set. "It's that cursed young boy of mine," he hissed; "this comes of his fooling in my pockets. By Gad! perhaps I won't warm him up when I get home. Say, I'll bet that it's in my hip-pocket. You just hold up the tail of my overcoat a second till I..."

"No, no," I protested again, "please don't take all this trouble, it really doesn't matter. I'm sure you needn't take off your overcoat, and oh, pray don't throw away your letters and things in the snow like that, and tear out your pockets by the roots! Please, please don't trample over your overcoat and put your feet through the parcels. I do hate to hear you swearing at your little boy, with that peculiar whine in your voice. Don't—please don't tear your clothes so savagely."

Suddenly the man gave a grunt of exultation, and drew his hand up from inside the lining of his coat.

"I've got it," he cried. "Here you are!" Then he brought it out under the light.

It was a toothpick.

Yielding to the impulse of the moment I pushed him under the wheels of a trolley-car, and ran.

1. How is "Borrowing a Match" structured?
2. Based on this story, how can one classify Stephen Leacock's style?

**Langston Hughes (1901-1967) was born in Joplin, Missouri. He was a noted poet, novelist, playwright, columnist, and social activist. As a writer, he was associated with the Harlem Renaissance.**

**Langston Hughes, "Thank You, M'am"**

She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy's weight and the weight of the purse combined caused him to lose his balance so, instead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk, and his legs flew up. The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter. Then she

reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

After that the woman said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here." She still held him. But she bent down enough to permit him to stoop and pick up her purse. Then she said, "Now ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, "Yes'm."

The woman said, "What did you want to do it for?"

The boy said, "I didn't aim to."

She said, "You a lie!"

By that time two or three people passed, stopped, turned to look, and some stood watching.

"If I turn you loose, will you run?" asked the woman.

"Yes'm," said the boy.

"Then I won't turn you loose," said the woman. She did not release him.

"I'm very sorry, lady, I'm sorry," whispered the boy.

"Um-hum! And your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you.

Ain't you got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?"

"No'm," said the boy.

"Then it will get washed this evening," said the large woman starting up the street, dragging the frightened boy behind her.

He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans.

The woman said, "You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are you hungry?"

"No'm," said the being dragged boy. "I just want you to turn me loose."

"Was I bothering you when I turned that corner?" asked the woman.

"No'm."

"But you put yourself in contact with me," said the woman. "If you think that that contact is not going to last awhile, you got another though coming. When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones."

Sweat popped out on the boy's face and he began to struggle. Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street. When she got to her door, she dragged the boy inside, down a hall, and into a large kitchenette-furnished room at the rear of the house. She switched on the light and left the door open. The boy could hear other roomers laughing and talking in the large house. Some of their doors were open, too, so he knew he and the woman were not alone. The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of her room.

She said, "What is your name?"

"Roger," answered the boy.

"Then, roger, you go to that sink and wash your face," said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose--at last. Roger looked at the door--looked at the woman--looked at the door--and went to the sink.

Let the water run until it gets warm," she said. "Here's a clean towel."

"You gonna take me to jail?" asked the boy, bending over the sink.

"Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere," said the woman. "Here I am trying to get home to cook me a bite to eat and you snatch my pocketbook! Maybe, you ain't been to your supper either, late as it be. Have you?"

"There's nobody home at my house," said the boy.

"Then we'll eat," said the woman, "I believe you're hungry--or been hungry--to try to snatch my pocketbook."

"I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes," said the boy.

"Well, you didn't have to snatch my pocketbook to get some suede shoes," said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. "You could of asked me."

"M'am?"

The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her. There was a long pause. A very long pause. After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next. The door was open. He could make a dash for it down the hall. He could run, run, run, run, run!

The woman was sitting on the day-bed. After a while she said, "I were young once and I wanted things I could not get."

There was another long pause. The boy's mouth opened. Then he frowned, but not knowing he frowned.

The woman said, "Um-hum! You thought I was going to say but, didn't you? You thought I was going to say, but I didn't snatch people's pocketbooks. Well, I wasn't going to say that." Pause. Silence. "I have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son--neither tell God, if he didn't already know. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look presentable."

In another corner of the room behind a screen was a gas plate and an icebox. Mrs. Jones got up and went behind the screen. The woman did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse which she left behind her on the day-bed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room where he thought she could easily see him out of the corner other eye, if she wanted to. He did not trust the woman not to trust him. And he did not want to be mistrusted now.

"Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy, "maybe to get some milk or something?"

"Don't believe I do," said the woman, "unless you just want sweet milk yourself. I was going to make cocoa out of this canned mild I got her."



"That will be fine," said the boy.

She heated some lima beans and ham she had in the icebox, made the cocoa, and set the table. The woman did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him. Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job in a hotel beauty-shop that stayed open late, what the work was like, and how all kinds of women came in and out, blondes, red-heads, and Spanish. Then she cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

"Eat some more, son," she said.

When they were finished eating she got up and said, "Now, here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto my pocketbook nor nobody else's—because shoes come be devilish like that will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in."

She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. "Goodnight!" Behave yourself, boy!" she said, looking out into the street.

The boy wanted to say something else other than "Thank you, m'am" to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but he couldn't do so as he turned at the barren stoop and looked back at the large woman in the door. He barely managed to say "Thank you" before she shut the door. And he never saw her again.

1. What sets the plot in motion?
2. How are the two characters portrayed?
3. What is the message of the story?