

the doorway, and began to waltz her around. We danced together quite well until she came down on my big toe with her brogans,⁸ hurting me so badly I thought I was crippled for life.

Doodle told them it was I who had taught him to walk, so everyone wanted to hug me, and I began to cry.

“What are you crying for?” asked Daddy, but I couldn’t answer. They did not know that I did it for myself; that pride, whose slave I was, spoke to me louder than all their voices, and that Doodle walked only because I was

ACTIVE READING

DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Notice how the narrator’s expectations of Doodle are tied to his own feelings. Do you judge the narrator for his pride as much as he judges himself?

ashamed of having a crippled brother.

Within a few months Doodle had learned to walk well and his go-cart was put up in the barn loft (it’s still there) beside his little mahogany coffin. Now, when we roamed off

together, resting often, we never turned back until our destination had been reached, and to help pass the time, we took up lying.⁹ From the beginning Doodle was a terrible liar and he got me in the habit. Had anyone stopped to listen to us, we would have been sent off to Dix Hill.

My lies were scary, involved, and usually pointless, but Doodle’s were twice as crazy. People in his stories all had wings and flew wherever they wanted to go. His favorite lie was about a boy named Peter who had a pet peacock with a ten-foot tail. Peter wore a golden robe that glittered so brightly that when he walked through the sunflowers they turned away from the sun to face him. When Peter was ready to go to sleep, the peacock spread his magnificent tail, enfolding the boy gently like a closing go-to-sleep flower, burying him in the gloriously iridescent, rustling vortex.¹⁰ Yes, I must admit it. Doodle could beat me lying.

Doodle and I spent lots of time thinking about our future. We decided that when we were grown we’d live in Old Woman Swamp and pick dog-tongue for a living. Beside the stream, he planned, we’d build us a house of whispering leaves and the swamp birds would be our chickens. All day long (when we weren’t gathering dog-tongue) we’d swing through the cypresses on the rope vines, and if it rained we’d huddle beneath an umbrella tree and play stickfrog. Mama and Daddy could come and live with us if they wanted to. He even came up with the idea that he could marry Mama and I could marry Daddy. Of course, I was old enough to know this wouldn’t work out, but the picture he painted was so beautiful and serene that all I could do was whisper Yes, yes.



nce I had succeeded in teaching Doodle to walk, I began to believe in my own infallibility, and I prepared a terrific development program for him, unknown to Mama and Daddy, of course. I would teach him to run, to swim, to climb trees, and to fight. He, too, now believed in my infallibility, so we set the deadline for these accomplishments less than a year away, when, it had been decided, Doodle could start to school.

That winter we didn’t make much progress, for I was in school and Doodle suffered from one bad cold after another. But when spring came, rich and warm, we raised our sights again. Success lay at the end of summer like a pot of gold, and our campaign got off to a good start. On hot days, Doodle and I went down to Horsehead Landing, and I gave him swimming lessons or showed him how to row a boat.

8. **brogans** (brō’gənz): heavy, ankle-high work shoes.

9. **lying**: here used to refer to the telling of tall tales, not untruths intended to deceive.

10. **vortex**: a whirlpool or whirlwind; here, a reference to the funnel-shaped covering of feathers.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

iridescent (īr’ī-dēs’ənt) *adj.* shining with shifting rainbow colors
infallibility (īn-fāl’ē-bīl’ī-tē) *n.* an inability to make errors

**Doodle
and I
spent lots
of time
thinking
about
our future.
We decided
that when
we were
grown we'd
live in
Old Woman
Swamp . . .**

Sometimes we descended into the cool greenness of Old Woman Swamp and climbed the rope vines or boxed scientifically beneath the pine where he had learned to walk. Promise hung about us like the leaves, and wherever we looked, ferns unfurled and birds broke into song.

That summer, the summer of 1918, was blighted. In May and June there was no rain and the crops withered, curled up, then died under the thirsty sun. One morning in July a hurricane came out of the east, tipping over the oaks in the yard and splitting the limbs of the elm trees. That afternoon it roared back out of the west, blew the fallen oaks around, snapping their roots and tearing them out of the earth like a hawk at the entrails¹¹ of a chicken. Cotton bolls were wrenched from the stalks and lay like green walnuts in the valleys between the rows, while the cornfield leaned over uniformly so that the tassels touched the ground. Doodle and I followed Daddy out into the cotton field, where he stood, shoulders sagging, surveying the ruin. When his chin sank down onto his chest, we were frightened, and Doodle slipped his hand into mine. Suddenly Daddy straightened his shoulders, raised a giant knuckly fist, and with a voice that seemed to rumble out of the earth itself began cursing heaven, hell, the weather, and the Republican Party.¹² Doodle and I, prodding each other and giggling, went back to the house, knowing that everything would be all right.

And during that summer, strange names were heard through the house: Château-Thierry, Amiens, Soissons, and in her blessing at the supper table, Mama once said, "And bless the Pearsons, whose boy Joe was lost at Belleau Wood."¹³

11. entrails: internal organs.

12. Republican Party: In 1918, most Southerners were Democrats.

13. Château-Thierry (shā-tō-tyě-rē'), Amiens (ä-myän'), Soissons (swā-sôn') . . . Belleau (bē-lō') Wood: places in France where famous battles were fought near the end of World War I.

So we came to that clove of seasons. School was only a few weeks away, and Doodle was far behind schedule. He could barely clear the ground when climbing up the rope vines, and his swimming was certainly not passable. We decided to double our efforts, to make that last drive and reach our pot of gold. I made him swim until he turned blue and row until he couldn't lift an oar. Wherever we went, I purposely walked fast, and although he kept up, his face turned red and his eyes became glazed. Once, he could go no further, so he collapsed on the ground and began to cry.

"Aw, come on, Doodle," I urged. "You can do it. Do you want to be different from everybody else when you start school?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"It certainly does," I said. "Now, come on," and I helped him up.

As we slipped through dog days,¹⁴ Doodle began to look feverish, and Mama felt his forehead, asking him if he felt ill. At night he didn't sleep well, and sometimes he had nightmares, crying out until I touched him and said, "Wake up, Doodle. Wake up."

It was Saturday noon, just a few days before school was to start. I should have already

ACTIVE READING

CLARIFY Why can't the two boys give up their program?

admitted defeat, but my pride wouldn't let me. The excitement of our program had now been gone for weeks, but still

we kept on with a tired doggedness. It was too late to turn back, for we had both wandered too far into a net of expectations and had left no crumbs behind.

Daddy, Mama, Doodle, and I were seated at the dining-room table having lunch. It was a hot day, with all the windows and doors open in case a breeze should come. In the kitchen Aunt Nicey was humming softly. After a long silence,

Daddy spoke. "It's so calm, I wouldn't be surprised if we had a storm this afternoon."

"I haven't heard a rain frog," said Mama, who believed in signs, as she served the bread around the table.

"I did," declared Doodle. "Down in the swamp?"

"He didn't," I said contrarily.

"You did, eh?" said Daddy, ignoring my denial.

"I certainly did," Doodle reiterated, scowling at me over the top of his iced-tea glass, and we were quiet again.

Suddenly, from out in the yard, came a strange croaking noise. Doodle stopped eating, with a piece of bread poised ready for his mouth, his eyes popped round like two blue buttons. "What's that?" he whispered.

I jumped up, knocking over my chair, and had reached the door when Mama called, "Pick up the chair, sit down again, and say excuse me."

By the time I had done this, Doodle had excused himself and had slipped out into the yard. He was looking up into the bleeding tree. "It's a great big red bird!" he called.

The bird croaked loudly again, and Mama and Daddy came out into the yard. We shaded our eyes with our hands against the hazy glare of the sun and peered up through the still leaves. On the topmost branch a bird the size of a chicken, with scarlet feathers and long legs, was perched precariously. Its wings hung down loosely, and as we watched, a feather dropped away and floated slowly down through the green leaves.

"It's not even frightened of us," Mama said.

14. **dog days**: the hot, uncomfortable days between early July and early September (named after the Dog Star, Sirius, which rises and sets with the sun at that time).

WORDS **doggedness** (dó'gĭd-nĭs) *n.* persistence; stubbornness
TO **reiterate** (rē-ĭt'ē-rāt') *v.* to repeat
KNOW **precariously** (prĭ-kār'ē-ēs-lē) *adv.* insecurely; in a dangerous way

Down Home (1992), Tony Couch. Watercolor, 22" × 30", private collection. Copyright © Tony Couch, from *Tony Couch's Keys to Successful Painting*, published by North Light Books, 1992.

"It looks tired," Daddy added. "Or maybe sick."

Doodle's hands were clasped at his throat, and I had never seen him stand still so long. "What is it?" he asked.

Daddy shook his head. "I don't know, maybe it's—"

At that moment the bird began to flutter, but the wings were uncoordinated, and amid much flapping and a spray of flying feathers, it tumbled down, bumping through the limbs of the bleeding tree and landing at our feet with a thud. Its long, graceful neck jerked twice into an S, then straightened out, and the bird was still. A white veil came over the eyes and the long white beak unhinged. Its legs were crossed and its clawlike feet were delicately curved at rest. Even death did not mar its grace, for it lay on the earth like a broken vase of red flowers, and we stood around it, awed by its exotic beauty.

"It's dead," Mama said.

"What is it?" Doodle repeated.

"Go bring me the bird book," said Daddy.

I ran into the house and brought back the bird book. As we watched, Daddy thumbed through its pages. "It's a scarlet ibis," he said, pointing to a picture. "It lives in the tropics—South America to Florida. A storm must have brought it here."

Sadly, we all looked back at the bird. A scarlet ibis! How many miles it had traveled to die like this, in *our* yard, beneath the bleeding tree.

"Let's finish lunch," Mama said, nudging us back toward the dining room.

"I'm not hungry," said Doodle, and he knelt down beside the ibis.

"We've got peach cobbler for dessert,"



Mama tempted from the doorway.

Doodle remained kneeling. "I'm going to bury him."

"Don't you dare touch him," Mama warned. "There's no telling what disease he might have had."

"All right," said Doodle. "I won't."

Daddy, Mama, and I went back to the dining-room table, but we watched Doodle through the open door. He took out a piece of string from his pocket and, without touching the ibis, looped one end around its neck. Slowly, while singing softly "Shall We Gather at the River," he carried the bird around to the front yard and dug a hole in the flower garden,

WORDS
TO
KNOW **exotic** (ĭg-zŏt'ĭk) *adj.* excitingly strange



“Go wash your hands, and then you can have some peach cobbler,” said Mama.

“I’m not hungry,” he said.

“Dead birds is bad luck,” said Aunt Nicey, poking her head from the kitchen door.

“Specially *red* dead birds!”

As soon as I had finished eating, Doodle and I hurried off to Horsehead Landing. Time was short, and Doodle still had a long way to go if he was going to keep up with the other boys when he started school. The sun, gilded with the yellow cast of autumn, still burned fiercely, but the dark green woods through which we passed were shady and cool. When we reached the landing, Doodle said he was too tired to swim, so we got into a skiff and floated down the creek with the tide. Far off in the marsh a rail was scolding, and over on the beach locusts were singing in the myrtle trees. Doodle did not speak and kept his head turned away, letting one hand trail limply in the water.

After we had drifted a long way, I put the oars in place and made Doodle row back against the tide. Black clouds began to gather in the southwest, and he kept watching them, trying to pull the oars a little faster. When we reached Horsehead Landing, lightning was playing across half the sky and thunder roared out, hiding even the sound of the sea. The sun disappeared and darkness descended, almost like night. Flocks of marsh crows flew by, heading inland to their roosting trees; and two egrets, squawking, arose from the oyster-rock shallows and careened away.

Doodle was both tired and frightened, and when he stepped from the skiff he collapsed onto the mud, sending an armada of fiddler crabs rustling off into the marsh grass. I helped him up, and as he wiped the mud off his trousers, he smiled at me ashamedly. He had

next to the petunia bed. Now we were watching him through the front window, but he didn’t know it. His awkwardness at digging the hole

ACTIVE READING

QUESTION Why do you think Doodle is so moved by the scarlet ibis?

with a shovel whose handle was twice as long as he was made us laugh, and we covered our mouths with our hands so he wouldn’t hear.

When Doodle came into the dining room, he found us seriously eating our cobbler. He was pale and lingered just inside the screen door. “Did you get the scarlet ibis buried?” asked Daddy.

Doodle didn’t speak but nodded his head.

failed and we both knew it, so we started back home, racing the storm. We never spoke (What are the words that can solder¹⁵ cracked pride?), but I knew he was watching me, watching for a sign of mercy. The lightning was near now, and from fear he walked so close behind me he kept stepping on my heels. The faster I walked, the faster he walked, so I began to run. The rain was coming, roaring through the pines, and then, like a bursting Roman candle, a gum tree ahead of us was shattered by a bolt of lightning. When the deafening peal of thunder had died, and in the moment before the rain arrived, I heard Doodle, who had fallen behind, cry out, “Brother, Brother, don’t leave me! Don’t leave me!”

The knowledge that Doodle’s and my plans had come to naught¹⁶ was bitter, and that streak of cruelty within me awakened. I ran as fast as I could, leaving him far behind with a wall of rain dividing us. The drops stung my face like nettles,¹⁷ and the wind flared the wet glistening leaves of the bordering trees. Soon I could hear his voice no more.

I hadn’t run too far before I became tired, and the flood of childish spite evanesced¹⁸ as well. I stopped and waited for Doodle. The sound of rain was everywhere, but the wind had died and it fell straight down in parallel paths like ropes hanging from the sky. As I waited, I peered through the downpour, but no one came. Finally I went back and found him huddled beneath a red nightshade bush beside the road. He was sitting on the ground, his face buried in his arms, which were resting on his drawn-up knees. “Let’s go, Doodle,” I said.

He didn’t answer, so I placed my hand on his forehead and lifted his head. Limply, he fell backward onto the earth. He had been bleeding from the mouth, and his neck and the front of his shirt were stained a brilliant red.

“Doodle! Doodle!” I cried, shaking him, but

there was no answer but the rosy rain. He lay very awkwardly, with his head thrown far back, making his vermilion¹⁹ neck appear unusually long and slim. His little legs, bent sharply at the knees, had never before seemed so fragile, so thin.

I began to weep, and the tear-blurred vision in red before me looked very familiar. “Doodle!” I screamed above the pounding storm and threw my body to the earth above his. For a long long time, it seemed forever, I lay there crying, sheltering my fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain. ❖

15. solder (sɒdʻər): to join or bond together.

16. naught: nothing.

17. nettles: weeds covered with stinging hairs.

18. evanesced (ɛvʻə-nɛstʻ): disappeared; vanished.

19. vermilion (vər-mɪlʻyən): bright red or scarlet.

LITERARY LINK

Woman with Flower Naomi Long Madgett

I wouldn’t coax the plant if I were you.
Such watchful nurturing may do it harm.
Let the soil rest from so much digging
And wait until it’s dry before you water it.
5 The leaf’s inclined to find its own direction;
Give it a chance to seek the sunlight
for itself.

Much growth is stunted by too careful
prodding,
10 Too eager tenderness.
The things we love we have to learn to
leave alone.

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

What was your reaction to the narrator's treatment of Doodle at the end of the story? Share your thoughts.

Comprehension Check

- How is Doodle different from other children?
- How does the narrator try to help Doodle?
- What are the narrator's motives for working with Doodle?

Literary Analysis

THEME The **theme** of a story may not be stated, but it is a central insight about life or human nature that the story illustrates. Different readers may find different themes in the same story. Here are some ways to look for a theme in a story:

- Review what happens to the main **character**. Does he or she change during the story? What does he or she learn about life?
- Skim the story for key phrases and sentences that say something about life or people in general.
- Think about the **title** of the story. Does it have a meaning that could lead you to a major theme?
- Remember that a story may have more than one theme.

Paired Activity Make a chart like the one shown. With a partner, go back through the story and list whatever statements you can find under the three headings. Remember that a theme should be expressed as a complete sentence, and that you may find more than one theme.

What Narrator Learns	Key Passages	Importance of Title

REVIEW SYMBOL A **symbol** is a person, an animal, a place, an activity, or an object that stands for something beyond itself. For example, a flag is a colored piece of cloth, but it also symbolizes a nation. Symbols can communicate complicated, emotionally rich ideas. Look for an obvious symbol in "The Scarlet Ibis." What does it have in common with what it symbolizes? How might this help suggest the **theme**?

Think Critically

2. ACTIVE READING DRAWING CONCLUSIONS ABOUT NARRATOR

Look back at what you jotted down in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. What **inferences** or **conclusions** can you draw about the **narrator's** state of mind as it changes during the course of the story?

3. What is your judgment of the narrator's treatment of Doodle?

THINK ABOUT

- which of his actions seem cruel
- the reasons he gives for his actions
- the effect of his actions on Doodle

4. What is your opinion of Doodle's **character**?

THINK ABOUT

- his strengths and weaknesses
- why his brother has such a powerful influence on him
- what his "lies" may reveal about him

5. As you look back at the story, what hints or clues do you see that **foreshadow** what eventually happens?


Extend Interpretations

6. **Critic's Corner** In his biography on page 607, Hurst comments that the **setting** of this story is one of the **characters**. What do you think he means?

7. **Comparing Texts** What advice does the poem "Woman with Flower" on page 604 seem to offer the narrator of "The Scarlet Ibis"? What is your opinion of the message of this poem?

8. **Connect to Life** The narrator says, "There is within me . . . a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love." Think about your relationships with people you love, especially in your family. Can love and cruelty exist at the same time? Why or why not?

Writing Options

- 1. Response to Narrator** Write a letter to the narrator of the story, describing your feelings about the day of Doodle's death. Offer insights to the narrator about how he may come to feel in the future, based on your own perspective. Place your letter in your **Working Portfolio**. 
- 2. Official Interview** Analyze the narrator's relationship with Doodle from another character's point of view. Write up your analysis as an interview between your character and a police officer investigating the case.
- 3. Interpretive Essay** Write an interpretation of Doodle's favorite lie, the one about the boy named Peter. Explain what you think it means.

Activities & Explorations

- 1. Thoughtful Soliloquy** Imagine that at the end of the story Doodle is only unconscious and that he later recovers. How might this affect the narrator, and what might he think to do next? Present his thoughts in a soliloquy, a speech in which a character reveals his or her thoughts when alone.
~ SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 2. Homestead Map** Use the descriptions in the story to create a map of Doodle's small world, with the house in the center and roads and paths leading away from it. Show where you imagine Horsehead Landing and the creek, Old Woman Swamp, the garden, the corn and cotton fields, the barn, and the bleeding tree to be located. Compare your map with those of your classmates. ~ ART

Inquiry & Research

Odd Birds Use Internet databases to do some research on ibises, which are little known in the United States outside of Florida. What are the basic characteristics of these birds? What kinds of ibises are there? How do they differ from one another?

 **More Online: Research Starter**
www.mcdougallittell.com

Art Connection

The portrait of a five-year-old boy on page 597 is one of several portraits Alice Neel (1900–1984) made of children. This boy, Richard, is posed naturally. What qualities of Doodle do you find reflected in Neel's painting?



Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE A: ASSESSMENT PRACTICE For each group of words below, write the letter of the word that is an antonym of the boldfaced word.

- 1. exotic:** (a) ordinary, (b) frightening, (c) indirect
- 2. careen:** (a) crawl, (b) hide, (c) race
- 3. heresy:** (a) conflict, (b) conformity, (c) distance
- 4. reiterate:** (a) cease, (b) lose, (c) originate
- 5. precariously:** (a) firmly, (b) cleverly, (c) thoughtlessly

Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on word relationships such as synonyms and antonyms, see page 849.

- 6. doggedness:** (a) intelligence, (b) kindness, (c) casualness
- 7. invalid:** (a) large, (b) healthy, (c) probable
- 8. infallibility:** (a) respectability, (b) inaccuracy, (c) absence
- 9. iridescent:** (a) obvious, (b) charming, (c) dull
- 10. imminent:** (a) distant, (b) native, (c) unknown

EXERCISE B With a small group of classmates, act out five of the vocabulary words, having the rest of the class try to guess the words.