

Oranges

Gary Soto

In this poem, Soto explores a young male's sexual awakening. This work offers both a wry and serious view of adolescence.

The first time I walked
With a girl, I was twelve,
Cold, and weighted down
With two oranges in my jacket.
5 December. Frost cracking
Beneath my steps, my breath
Before me, then gone,
As I walked toward
Her house, the one whose
10 Porch light burned yellow
Night and day, in any weather.
A dog barked at me, until
She came out pulling
At her gloves, face bright
15 With rouge. I smiled,
Toucher her shoulder, and led
Her down the street, across
A used car lot and a line
Of newly planted trees,
20 Until we were breathing
Before a drugstore. We
Entered, the tiny bell
Bringing a saleslady
Down a narrow aisle of goods.
25 I turned to the candies
Tiered like bleachers,
And asked what she wanted—
Light in her eyes, a smile
Starting at the corners
30 Of her mouth. I fingered
A nickel in my pocket,
And when she lifted a chocolate
That cost a dime,
I didn't say anything.
35 I took the nickel from
My pocket, then an orange,
And set them quietly on
The counter. When I looked up,

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And set them quietly on
The counter. When I looked up,

The lady's eyes met mine,
40 And held them, knowing
Very well what it was all
About.

Outside,
A few cars hissing past,
45 Fog hanging like old
Coats between the trees.
I took my girl's hand
In mine for two blocks,
Then released it to let
50 Her unwrap the chocolate.
I peeled my orange
That was so bright against
The gray of December
That, from some distance,
55 Someone might have thought
I was making a fire in my hands.

■ ■ ■ EXPLORATIONS OF THE TEXT ■ ■ ■

1. What is the significance of the purchase at the drugstore?
2. Explore the symbolism of peeling the paper from the chocolate, peeling the orange, and the last line. What do these images suggest?
3. Examine the images associated with weather. How does the time of year enhance the mood of the poem?

■ ■ ■ JOURNAL ENTRIES ■ ■ ■

1. Write a monologue in the voice of the young girl.
2. How does the outside world, the environment, influence the speaker's experience? Are there clues in the poem?

■ ■ ■ IDEAS FOR WRITING ■ ■ ■

1. What do the last two lines of the poem mean? Do they present a satisfying conclusion?
2. Write about your first date.

Adolescence
Adolescence
Adolescence

Rita Dove

Rita Dove
American
poet
and
novelist
born
1952
Cincinnati,
Ohio

In the
middle
of
the
American
poem

The
young
girl
is
the
center
of
the
poem

The
poem
is
a
study
of
the
young
girl's
experience