

Eleven

Short Story by Sandra Cisneros

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML6-198

Is **AGE** more than a number?



READING 6B Recognize conversational voice. **6C** Describe different forms of point of view, including first-person. **8** Understand how an author's sensory language creates imagery. **RC-6(C)** Monitor and adjust comprehension (creating sensory images).

For some people, a birthday is an exciting, festive event. With each increase in age, they feel more mature. For others, a birthday is just the day they were born. Inside, they may not feel any different than they did the day before. In "Eleven," a young girl struggles with what it means to grow older.

WEB IT Think about what your age means to you. Create a web that shows the things that matter to you now. Consider how the web would change if you were one year older or younger.



LITERARY ANALYSIS: FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

This story lets you into the mind of its main character, Rachel, who is also the narrator. Rachel uses the **first-person point of view**, speaking as “I.” As she tells her story, Rachel reveals the qualities of her character through her words, thoughts, and feelings. Because Rachel is telling the story herself, you won’t know for sure what other characters are thinking and feeling. You’ll only know what Rachel tells you.

As you read, notice how Rachel’s personality is conveyed through her own very individual **conversational voice**, the way she speaks to others. Look for phrases and descriptions that make Rachel’s voice unique.

READING STRATEGY: CONNECT

Authors often express an idea or a feeling with **imagery**, words and phrases that appeal to the senses of sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing. The imagery in a story may remind you of feelings and experiences you’ve had or read about in other stories. When you connect through sensory imagery, you use your feelings, experiences, and imagination to help you understand what you are reading.

As you read, record imagery from the story in a chart like the one shown. Then describe connections that you can make between those images and your own experiences.

Imagery	My Connections
<i>“underneath the year that makes you eleven”</i>	<i>I remember still feeling 10 on my 11th birthday.</i>

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Sandra Cisneros uses the words in the list below to help tell the story of a young girl’s difficult experience in school. Complete each phrase with the appropriate word from the list.

WORD LIST alley except invisible raggedy

- _____ for math, the girl did well in school.
- She felt _____ among the crowds of students.
- Her old, _____ clothes embarrassed her.
- After school, she ran home through the back _____.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Sandra Cisneros

born 1954

Love of Language

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago where she grew up in a bilingual home, speaking English to her mother and Spanish to her father. For that reason, different aspects of language became more noticeable to her.

Escaping Through Fairy Tales

As a child, Cisneros enjoyed reading fairy tales. She loved the style of language used, and in time she began writing her own stories and poems. Cisneros’s mother made sure that her daughter had the space and quiet that she needed in order to write, even in a house with six brothers.

Writing to Be Heard

In much of her writing, Cisneros explores the feeling of being out of place. As a child, Cisneros was shy, much like Rachel in “Eleven.” She notes, “I am finding that with words I have the power to make people listen, to make them think in a new way. . . . It’s a powerful thing to make people listen to you.”

Author
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KEYWORD: HML6-199



ELEVEN

Sandra Cisneros

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are—underneath the year that makes you eleven.

Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your
10 mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five. And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.

You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way
20 it is.

Analyze Visuals ▶

Based on the colors and details in this painting, how do you think the girl is feeling?

Language Coach

Figurative Language When Rachel says that growing older is “like an onion,” she is using a **simile**, a type of figurative language. A simile is a comparison of unlike things that uses a word such as *like* or *as*. What other similes does she use in lines 14–16?

Detail of *Room 13, Los Estudiantes* (2004), José Ramirez. Mixed media on canvas, 47" × 19".



Only today I wish I didn't have only eleven years rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box. Today I wish I was one hundred and two instead of eleven because if I was one hundred and two I'd have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk. I would've known how to tell her it wasn't mine instead of just sitting there with that look on my face and nothing coming out of my mouth.

"Whose is this?" Mrs. Price says, and she holds the red sweater up in the air for all the class to see. "Whose? It's been sitting in the coatroom for a month."

30 "Not mine," says everybody. "Not me."

"It has to belong to somebody," Mrs. Price keeps saying, but nobody can remember. It's an ugly sweater with red plastic buttons and a collar and sleeves all stretched out like you could use it for a jump rope. It's maybe a thousand years old and even if it belonged to me I wouldn't say so. **A**

Maybe because I'm skinny, maybe because she doesn't like me, that stupid Sylvia Saldívar says, "I think it belongs to Rachel." An ugly sweater like that, all **raggedy** and old, but Mrs. Price believes her. Mrs. Price takes the sweater and puts it right on my desk, but when I open my mouth nothing comes out.

40 "That's not, I don't, you're not . . . Not mine," I finally say in a little voice that was maybe me when I was four.

"Of course it's yours," Mrs. Price says. "I remember you wearing it once." Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not. **B**

Not mine, not mine, not mine, but Mrs. Price is already turning to page thirty-two, and math problem number four. I don't know why but all of a sudden I'm feeling sick inside, like the part of me that's three wants to come out of my eyes, only I squeeze them shut tight and bite down on my teeth real hard and try to remember today I am eleven, eleven. Mama is making a cake for me for tonight, and when Papa comes home everybody
50 will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to you.

But when the sick feeling goes away and I open my eyes, the red sweater's still sitting there like a big red mountain. I move the red sweater to the corner of my desk with my ruler. I move my pencil and books and eraser as far from it as possible. I even move my chair a little to the right. Not mine, not mine, not mine.

In my head I'm thinking how long till lunchtime, how long till I can take the red sweater and throw it over the schoolyard fence, or leave it hanging on a parking meter, or bunch it up into a little ball and toss it in the **alley**. **Except** when math period ends Mrs. Price says loud and in
60 front of everybody, "Now, Rachel, that's enough," because she sees I've shoved the red sweater to the tippy-tip corner of my desk and it's hanging all over the edge like a waterfall, but I don't care.

A CONNECT

Reread lines 31–34. How does the imagery describing the sweater help you understand how Rachel feels?

raggedy (răg'ĭ-dē) *adj.*
tattered or worn out



TEKS 6B

B CONVERSATIONAL VOICE

Writers use **dialogue**—a conversation between characters—to reveal important qualities. As the words come tumbling out, Cisneros reveals Rachel's anxious and uncomfortable reaction to the red sweater. Suppose the teacher were trying to give Rachel a beautiful new red sweater. How might Rachel react? How might a positive response from Rachel change your understanding of her character and the story?

alley (ăl'ē) *n.* a narrow street behind or between buildings

except (ĭk-sĕpt') *prep.*
but; however

“Rachel,” Mrs. Price says. She says it like she’s getting mad. “You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense.”

“But it’s not—”

“Now!” Mrs. Price says. **C**

This is when I wish I wasn’t eleven, because all the years inside of me—ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one—are pushing at the back of my eyes when I put one arm through one sleeve
70 of the sweater that smells like cottage cheese, and then the other arm through the other and stand there with my arms apart like if the sweater hurts me and it does, all itchy and full of germs that aren’t even mine.

That’s when everything I’ve been holding in since this morning, since when Mrs. Price put the sweater on my desk, finally lets go, and all of a sudden I’m crying in front of everybody. I wish I was **invisible** but I’m not. I’m eleven and it’s my birthday today and I’m crying like I’m three in front of everybody. I put my head down on the desk and bury my face in my stupid clown-sweater arms. My face all hot and spit coming out of my mouth because I can’t stop the little animal noises from coming out of
80 me, until there aren’t any more tears left in my eyes, and it’s just my body shaking like when you have the hiccups, and my whole head hurts like when you drink milk too fast. **D**

But the worst part is right before the bell rings for lunch. That stupid Phyllis Lopez, who is even dumber than Sylvia Saldívar, says she remembers the red sweater is hers! I take it off right away and give it to her, only Mrs. Price pretends like everything’s okay. **E**

Today I’m eleven. There’s a cake Mama’s making for tonight, and when Papa comes home from work we’ll eat it. There’ll be candles and presents and everybody will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to you, Rachel,
90 only it’s too late.

I’m eleven today. I’m eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one, but I wish I was one hundred and two. I wish I was anything but eleven, because I want today to be far away already, far away like a runaway balloon, like a tiny *o* in the sky, so tiny-tiny you have to close your eyes to see it. 

C FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

What impression of Mrs. Price does Rachel give the reader?

invisible (ɪn-ˈvɪz-ə-bəl)
adj. not able to be seen

D CONNECT

Reread lines 67–82. Which **images** help you understand Rachel’s feelings?

E FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 83–86. How does the first-person point of view affect what you know about Sylvia and Phyllis?

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Rachel uses many different comparisons to describe what it is like to grow older. Name one of the comparisons she makes.
2. **Recall** What thoughts does Rachel have about the sweater as she is putting it on?
3. **Clarify** How is the issue of the sweater finally settled?



READING 6B Recognize conversational voice. **6C** Describe different forms of point of view, including first-person. **RC-6(C)** Monitor and adjust comprehension (creating sensory images).

Literary Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** What is it about growing older that Rachel finds disappointing? Use examples from the story to support your answer.
5. **Connect** Review your imagery chart. How do the connections you made through imagery help you understand Rachel’s experience?
6. **Analyze Conversational Voice** Reread lines 35–41. Imagine that Rachel is bold instead of timid. What might she have said when Mrs. Price put the sweater on her desk? Describe the characteristics of a bold Rachel.
7. **Analyze a Minor Character** Minor characters help carry out the action of a story. Mrs. Price is a minor character in “Eleven,” but she plays an important part in the story. How do you think Mrs. Price would describe the incident with the sweater? Use details to support your answer.
8. **Evaluate First-Person Point of View** As the narrator of the story, Rachel shares many of her thoughts and feelings. However, she is not able to tell us the thoughts and feelings of the other characters. Using a chart like the one shown, note what you learned through the story’s first-person point of view and what you would still like to know.

<i>What I Learned from Rachel</i>	<i>What I Would Like to Know</i>

Extension and Challenge

9. **Creative Project: Art** The red sweater is an important part of “Eleven.” How did you picture it in your mind as you read the story? Create a picture of the sweater as you imagined it.

Is AGE more than a number?

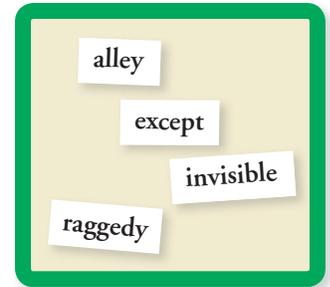
Revisit the activity on page 198. This time, think about how Rachel might have filled out a web about her age. Use details from the story to complete Rachel’s web.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the letter of the word or phrase that is most closely related to the boldfaced word.

- except:** (a) not including, (b) with, (c) as well as, (d) plus
- invisible:** (a) impossible, (b) white, (c) unseen, (d) unwell
- alley:** (a) highway, (b) narrow path, (c) parking lot, (d) freeway
- raggedy:** (a) shabby, (b) tidy, (c) elegant, (d) beautiful



ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• convey • create • influence • interact • qualities

What surprised you most about the way Mrs. Price and Rachel **interacted**? What does each character say to **convey** her feelings? Write a paragraph about what you think. Use at least two of the Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: SPANISH WORDS FREQUENTLY USED IN ENGLISH

American English has borrowed words from Spanish for centuries. You can sometimes figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar Spanish word by thinking of English words that it resembles.

PRACTICE Use an English dictionary that includes the origins of words, including the language they came from. Look up each of the words below and record their Spanish origins and meanings, as well as their English meanings. Then, use each word in a sentence. The first word has been done for you.

<i>Five Words From Spanish</i>			
<i>Word</i>	<i>Spanish Word and Spanish Meaning</i>	<i>English Meaning</i>	<i>Sentence</i>
tornado	tornar; "to turn"	whirlwind; rapidly rotating column of air	The tornado ripped the roof off the house.
cafeteria			
chocolate			
patio			
stampede			



READING 2A Determine the meaning of grade-level academic English words derived from other linguistic roots. **2D** Explain the meaning of foreign words commonly used in written English.

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