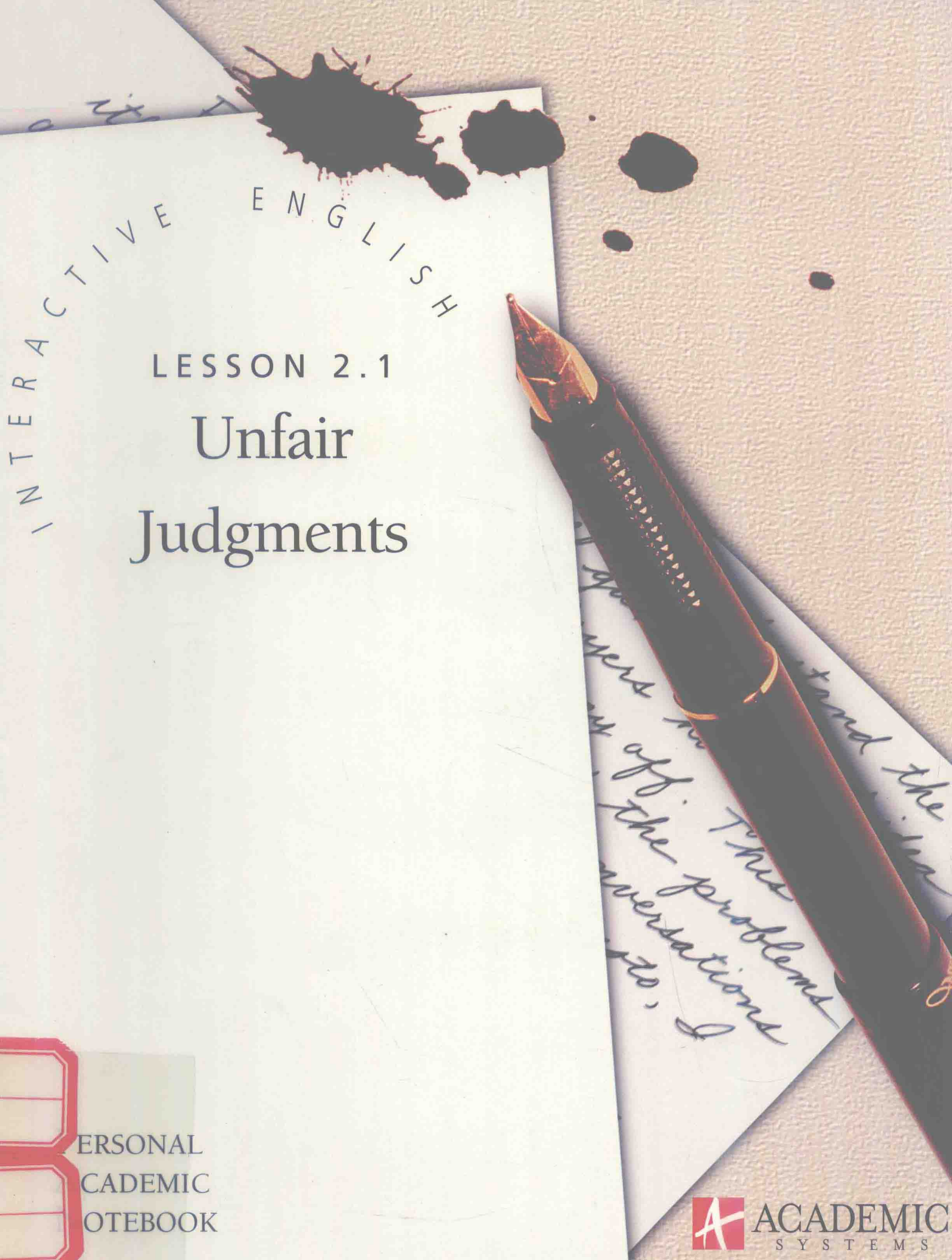
INTERACTIVE ENGLISH

LESSON 2.1

Unfair Judgments



PERSONAL
ACADEMIC
NOTEBOOK

ACADEMIC SYSTEMS

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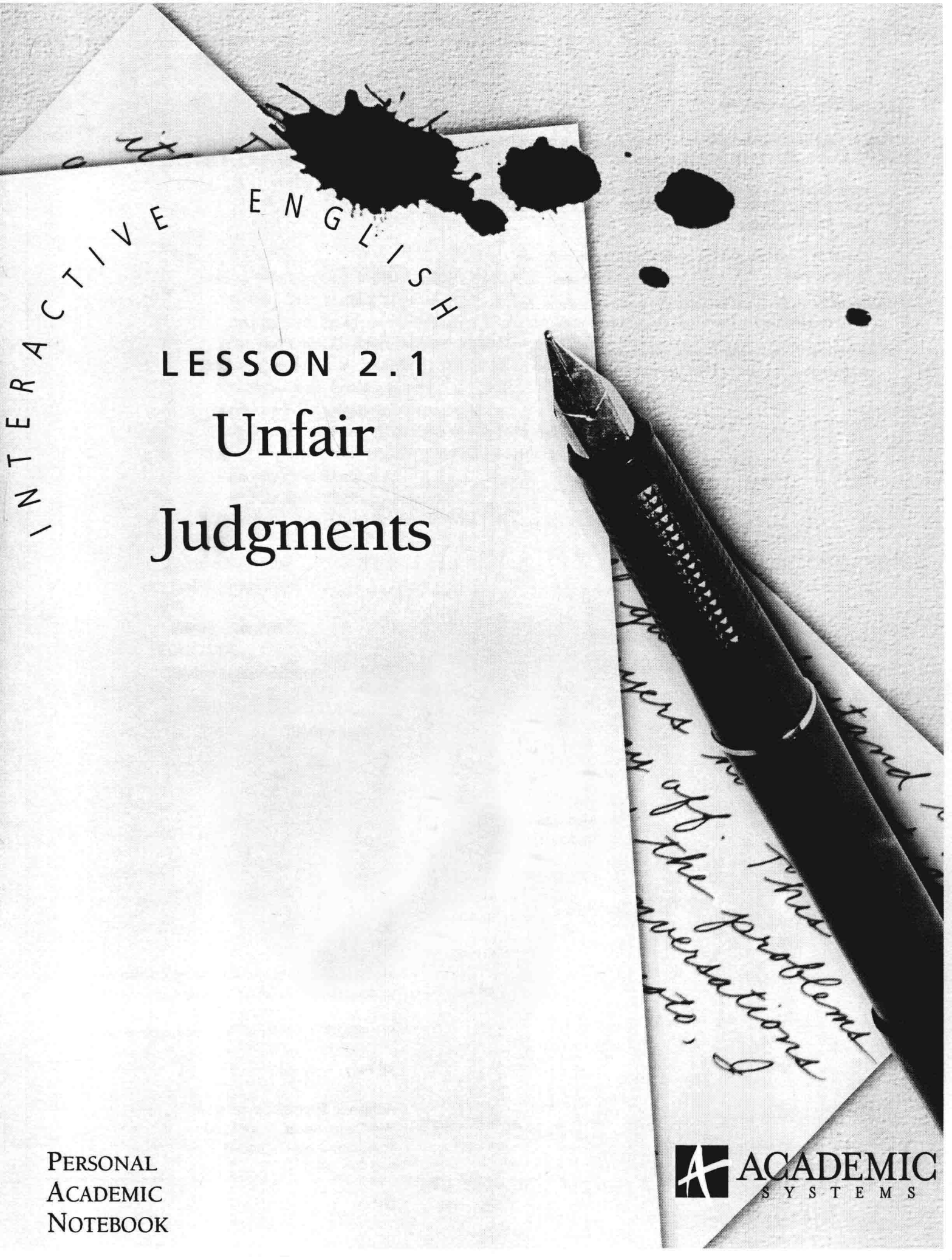

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Richard Cory." From *Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York: Macmillan, 1961) by E. A. Robinson.

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"Sunday in the Park," by Bel Kaufman. Bel Kaufman is the author of the best-seller, *Up The Down Staircase*.

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Table of Contents

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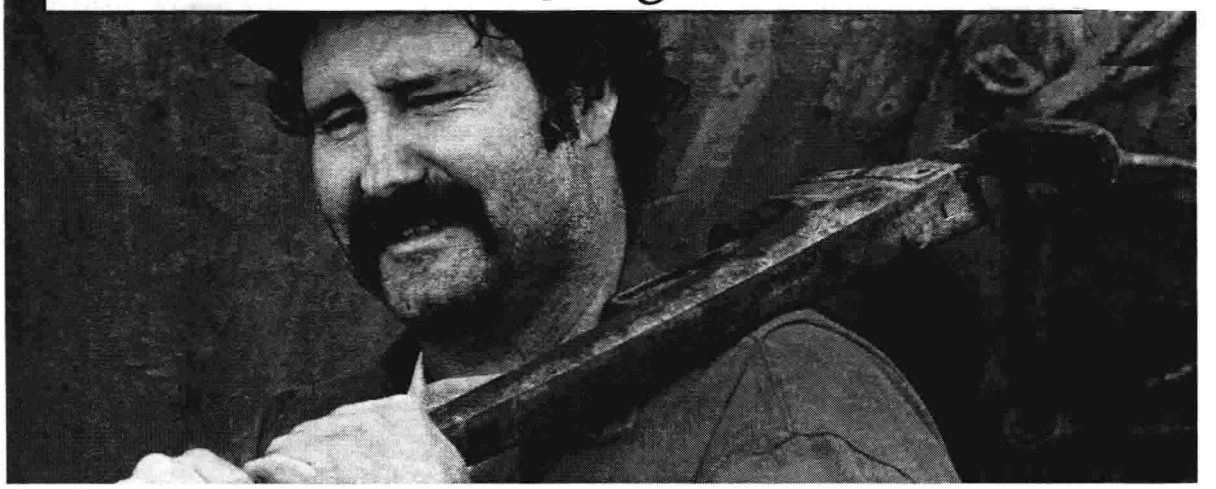
Unfair Judgments



This chapter will help you think about images and attitudes from your personal experience. The materials in this chapter supplement your work in the **Explore**, **Revise**, **Edit**, and **Conclude** modules.

EXPLORE

Experienced writers rarely face a blank page. Generally, they begin to generate some enthusiasm, and some ideas, by discovering what they already know about a subject; they explore. Cultivate your own good ideas. Think carefully about Questions to Explore.

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

Take time to respond with care to each of the questions below and to any others that occur to you. If you have not written your responses online, write them in the space provided below. When you read what you've written, you will see you have many ideas about images and attitudes.

- Have you ever been in a situation where someone misjudged you for some superficial reason? Have you ever misjudged someone else for a superficial reason?

- We often hear people say, "Put yourself in her (or his) shoes for a minute." What does this mean to you?

- Why do people use stereotypes? What purpose could they serve? When and where do you use stereotypes?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Perhaps in responding to Questions to Explore, you unexpectedly remembered how you felt when someone teased you unfairly. Or perhaps you realized how to avoid an unfair judgment in the future. Inspiration often comes from exploring ideas. But before you jump from one enticing idea to the next, read the assignment for the essay in this lesson.

Our attitudes often shape how we see others. We often absorb these attitudes from our communities and cultures without being fully aware of them. Studying images and attitudes—those we have of others and those others have about us—can tell us a great deal about the communities and cultures we belong to.

To study images and attitudes, think about an experience in which someone judged you unfairly. Consider who you were: the images you conveyed. Just as carefully, consider the person who judged you unfairly. Standing in the other person's shoes for a moment, consider some possible reasons this person had for misinterpreting your character and action. Either at the time or now, by looking back and examining the incident, what have you learned from being misunderstood?

Write an essay in which you relate an incident in which someone judged you unfairly. Describe and illustrate who you were, and the reasons you can imagine that may have led this other person to misinterpret your character or actions. Conclude by reflecting on what you learned from being unfairly judged or misunderstood.

READING TO EXPLORE

The readings by E. A. Robinson, Brent Staples, and Bel Kaufman examine how images may provoke certain attitudes in others. Each reading may help you think of unfair judgments you've experienced, and may show ways to write your essay.

Know the Author. Edwin Arlington Robinson was born in Head Tide, Maine, in 1869. He went to Harvard University and after graduation supported himself in various jobs: office assistant, advertising editor, time-checker for the IRT subway in New York, N.Y. He wrote long narrative poems and character studies, focusing on New England. His work was awarded Pulitzer Prizes in 1922, 1925, and 1928. From 1911 until his death in 1935, he was guest writer at the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, N.H.

Prepare to Read.

Watch for the images in this poem that contrast two life styles. What are these two life styles?

Your Reading Goal is to understand and react to both Richard Cory and those who saw but never knew him. Consider your experiences with unfair judgments in the light of this poem.

Prepare to Make Reading Notes. As you read, quickly mark several lines in the poem that impress you. Perhaps you will select one because it sounds good; another may confuse you, and a third may remind you of an experience in your life. A chart to make reading notes follows this reading selection.

RICHARD CORY

by E. A. Robinson

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
1 He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
2 But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king,
And admirably schooled in every grace:
3 In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,

And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;

And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,

Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Activity One: Reading Notes

Use the space below for reading notes on the lines you marked. Copy each line into the column on the left. Then, write your response in the right column. Explain why you marked this line and what you thought about it. Finally, complete the middle column. Put in your own words—as you understood it—what the poet meant by that line.

As an example, here are reading notes done by one student. When you have finished making your reading notes, discuss them with a partner if possible.

Author Says	Summary	My Response
He was always human when he talked; But still he fluttered pulses when he said, "good morning,"	I guess this means this guy did not put on airs but people still saw him as special.	This line reminds me of a musician I knew. He was totally nice to everyone but people were so busy asking for his autograph and free tickets to concerts that they never even knew him. He was lonely.

Author Says	Summary	My Response

Activity Two: An Experienced Reader's Thoughts While Reading

Experienced readers know that they must carefully visualize each line in a poem, since poets pack many meanings into few words.

In the left-hand column below, an experienced reader describes her developing understanding of "Richard Cory." As you read this description, imagine you are hearing her think aloud as she reads. The right hand column tells you what the reader did, so that you can use these reading strategies on your own.

Richard Cory. Who's that? I can't tell a thing about him yet, or where he went—is it a city? Maybe. Back up to when the poet lived. Okay maybe this poem was written in 1890's or so, and the poet is from New England. So I'm going to say Boston. Okay, so Richard goes down town, meets some "people on the pavement,"—no, not meets them. The people on the pavement are watching him. I guess they are like lower than him. It's like he's walking above them, somehow. He's a gentleman, clean-cut, an aristocrat, his hands and feet and body are all slender, like a person who doesn't dig ditches. Is he snobbish, lording it over all those guys on the pavement? Says he's "human," and people (women whose hearts beat harder just to see him?) like him, hoped he'd say more to them than hi there (but he never did, I guess), and he glittered when he—

Because the title doesn't reveal much about the poem, the reader creates her own mental image of this character and where he went. She doesn't just invent this scene though; she uses what seems most likely because of where and when the poet lived.

This reader also figures out who the other characters are, and how they relate to the first character. **Notice that in a poem, an image like "people on the pavement" becomes important.**

wow! like a kind of aura about him. No wonder those guys are jealous. He's got the life the people on the pavement want—handsome, rich, well-educated, a great dancer, a good conversationalist, totally together.

We—those same people on the pavement that stared at Richard Cory—we worked, that terrible gut-wrenching routine all day every day. I imagine them sweating in the rain, moving boxes or something, and the women hanging out tons of laundry for their family—it's 1900, no automatic washers except for human beings. Everyone was waiting for the light at the end of the tunnel, good luck, winning a lottery or something. They did without the luxuries. Cursed the necessities they did have—ugh, they were miserable.

—Then. It's a summer evening, quiet except for night sounds. I guess even the people on the pavement are taking a break. But in the dark, Richard Cory—that lucky stiff that everybody thought had his own private sunshine—picked up a gun and killed himself.

This reader examines each part of the poem, and brings her own thoughts to expand the lines whereever she can. **A poem requires readers to focus on each line and to understand it in the light of what they know about people.**

This reader responds to the shift in mood—from the work-a-day world to the feeling of summer evenings. **Shifts in mood are especially important in poems.**

Nobody knew how it was for him. They judged him unfairly, thinking only about their troubles and never seeing him as a person.

This reader relates the poem to the theme of the lesson. **Take a moment to pause for reflection. Connect the poem to the reason you read it.**

The experienced reader used several strategies to understand the essay.

- What do you understand about the reading now that you didn't before?

- What strategies can you borrow?

On Your Own: Reading Strategies to Use Now and Later

Strengthen your reading by using anything you can learn from an experienced reader. Try one of these reading strategies as you read the next selection.

1. Use what you know to expand what an author says.
2. Double-check your response. After you restate the author's meaning, you may want to add to or refine your response.
3. Relate what you read to the lesson's theme: how people make unfair judgments. What details make it clear that a person in a poem, story, or essay is being misjudged?

Read the next selection with a partner if possible.

Know the Author. Bel Kaufman was born in Berlin, Germany, raised in Russia, and came to the United States at the age of 12. She got her Master's degree from Hunter College. She wrote a best-selling novel *Up the Down Staircase*, a story of an urban high school based on her teaching career. The novel, which sold 1,500,000 copies in the first week, was also a popular movie. Writing is a tradition in her family; the humorist Sholom Aleichem was her grandfather. She writes, lectures, and "cares passionately" about teaching.

Prepare to Read.

Watch for how the incident seems to happen before your eyes.

Your Reading Goal is to understand and react to an incident of an unfair judgment. Consider your experiences with unfair judgments in the light of this short story.

Prepare to Make Reading Notes. As you read, quickly underline or mark at least three sentences that seem important to you. Select at least one sentence that implies an unfair judgment. A chart for your reading notes follows the reading selection.

SUNDAY IN THE PARK

by Bel Kaufman

It was still warm in the late-afternoon sun, and the city noises came muffled through the trees in the park. She put her book down on the bench, removed her sunglasses, and sighed contentedly. Morton was reading the *Times Magazine* section, one arm flung around her shoulder; their three-year-old son, Larry, was playing in the sandbox: a faint breeze fanned her hair softly against her cheek. It was five-thirty of a Sunday afternoon, and the small playground, tucked away in a corner of the park, was all but deserted. The swings and seesaws stood motionless and abandoned, the slides were empty, and only in the sandbox two little boys squatted diligently side by side. *How good this is*, she thought, and almost smiled at her sense of well-being. They must go out in the sun more often; Morton was so city-pale, cooped up all week inside the gray factorylike university. She squeezed his arm affectionately and glanced at Larry, delighting in the pointed little face frowning in concentration over the tunnel he was digging. The other boy suddenly stood up and with a quick, deliberate swing of his chubby arm threw a spadeful of sand at Larry. It just missed his head. Larry continued digging; the boy remained standing, shovel raised,

stolid and impassive.

"No, no, little boy." She shook her finger at him, her eyes searching for the child's mother or nurse. "We mustn't throw sand. It may get in someone's eyes and hurt. We must play nicely in the nice sandbox." The boy looked at her in unblinking expectancy. He was about Larry's age but perhaps ten pounds heavier, a husky little boy with none of Larry's quickness and sensitivity in his face. Where was his mother? The only other people left in the playground were two women and a little girl on roller skates leaving now through the gate, and a man on a bench a few feet away. He was a big man, and he seemed to be taking up the whole bench as he held the Sunday comics close to his face. She supposed he was the child's father. He did not look up from his comics, but spat once deftly out of the corner of his mouth. She turned her eyes away. 2

At that moment, as swiftly as before, the fat little boy threw another spadeful of sand at Larry. This time some of it landed on his hair and forehead. Larry looked up at his mother, his mouth tentative; her expression would tell him whether to cry or not. 3

Her first instinct was to rush to her son, brush the sand out of his hair, and punish the other child, but she controlled it. She always said that she wanted Larry to learn to fight his own battles. 4

"Don't *do* that, little boy," she said sharply, leaning forward on the bench. "You mustn't throw sand!" 5

The man on the bench moved his mouth as if to spit again, but instead he spoke. He did not look at her, but at the boy only. 6

"You go right ahead, Joe," he said loudly. "Throw all you want. This here is a *public* sandbox." 7

She felt a sudden weakness in her knees as she glanced at Morton. He had become aware of what was happening. He put his *Times* down carefully on his lap and turned his fine, lean face toward the man, smiling the shy, apologetic smile he might have offered a student in pointing out an error in his thinking. When he spoke to the man, it was with his usual reasonableness. 8

"You're quite right," he said pleasantly, "but just because this is a public place..." 9

The man lowered his funnies and looked at Morton. He looked at him from head to foot, slowly and deliberately. "Yeah?" His inso-

lent voice was edged with menace. "My kid's got just as good right
10 here as yours, and if he feels like throwing sand, he'll throw it, and if you don't like it, you can take your kid the hell out of here."

The children were listening, their eyes and mouths wide open, their spades forgotten in small fists. She noticed the muscle in Morton's jaw tighten. He was rarely angry; he seldom lost his tem-
11 per. She was suffused with a tenderness for her husband and an impotent rage against the man for involving him in a situation so alien and so distasteful to him.

12 "Now, just a minute," Morton said courteously, "you must realize..."

13 "Aw, shut up," said the man.

Her heart began to pound. Morton half rose; the *Times* slid to the ground. Slowly the other man stood up. He took a couple of steps toward Morton, then stopped. He flexed his great arms, wait-
14 ing. She pressed her trembling knees together. Would there be violence, fighting? How dreadful, how incredible... She must do something, stop them, call for help. She wanted to put her hand on her husband's sleeve, to pull him down, but for some reason she didn't.

15 Morton adjusted his glasses. He was very pale. "This is ridiculous," he said unevenly. "I must ask you...

"Oh, yeah?" said the man. He stood with his legs spread apart,
16 rocking a little, looking at Morton with utter scorn. "You and who else?"

For a moment the two men looked at each other nakedly. Then Morton turned his back on the man and said quietly, "Come on,
17 let's get out of here." He walked awkwardly, almost limping with selfconsciousness, to the sandbox. He stooped and lifted Larry and his shovel out.

At once Larry came to life; his face lost its rapt expression and he began to kick and cry. "I don't *want* to go home, I want to play better, I don't *want* any supper, I don't *like* supper...." It became a chant as they walked, pulling their child between them, his feet
18 dragging on the ground. In order to get to the exit gate they had to pass the bench where the man sat sprawling again. She was careful not to look at him. With all the dignity she could summon, she pulled Larry's sandy, perspiring little hand, while Morton pulled

the other. Slowly and with head high she walked with her husband and child out of the playground.

Her first feeling was one of relief that the fight had been avoided, that no one was hurt. Yet beneath it there was a layer of something else, something heavy and inescapable. She sensed that it was more than just an unpleasant incident, more than defeat of reason by force. She felt dimly it had something to do with her and Morton, something acutely personal, familiar, and important. 19

Suddenly Morton spoke. "It wouldn't have proved anything." 20

"What?" she asked. 21

"A fight. It wouldn't have proved anything beyond the fact that he's bigger than I am." 22

"Of course," she said. 23

"The only possible outcome," he continued reasonably, "would have been—what? My glasses broken, perhaps a tooth or two replaced, a couple of days' work missed—and for what? For justice? For truth?" 24

"Of course," she repeated. She quickened her step. She wanted only to get home and to busy herself with her familiar tasks; perhaps then the feeling, glued like heavy plaster on her heart would be gone. *Of all the stupid, despicable bullies*, she thought, pulling harder on Larry's hand. The child was still crying. Always before she had felt a tender pity for his defenseless little body, the frail arms, the narrow shoulders with sharp, winglike shoulder blades, the thin and unsure legs, but now her mouth tightened in resentment. 25

"Stop crying," she said sharply. "I'm ashamed of you!" She felt as if all three of them were tracking mud along the street. The child cried louder. 26

If there had been an issue involved, she thought, *if there had been something to fight for... But what else could he possibly have done? Allow himself to be beaten? Attempt to educate the man? Call a policeman? "Officer, there's a man in the park who won't stop his child from throwing sand on mine...."* The whole thing was as silly as that, and not worth thinking about. 27

"Can't you keep him quiet, for Pete's sake?" Morton asked irritably. 28