

100 **T**he three weeks passed quickly. The day before the play, Robert felt happy as he walked home from school with no homework. As he turned onto his street, he found a dollar floating over the currents of wind.

“A buck,” he screamed to himself. He snapped it up and looked for others. But he didn’t find any more. It was his lucky day, though. At recess he had hit a home run on a fluke bunt—a fluke because the catcher had kicked the ball, another player had thrown it into center field, and the pitcher wasn’t looking when Robert slowed down at third, then burst home with dust flying behind him.

That night, it was his sister’s turn to do the dishes. They had eaten enchiladas with the works, so she slaved with suds up to her elbows. 110 Robert bathed in bubble bath, the suds peaked high like the Donner Pass. He thought about how full he was and how those poor people had had nothing to eat but snow. I can live on nothing, he thought and whistled like wind through a mountain pass, raking flat the suds with his palm. **E**

The next day, after lunch, he was ready for the play, red beard in hand and his one line trembling on his lips. Classes herded into the auditorium. As the actors dressed and argued about stepping on each other’s feet, Robert stood near a cardboard barrel full of toys, whispering over and over to himself, “Nothing’s wrong. I can see.” He was hot, itchy, and confused when he tied on the beard. He sneezed when a strand of the 120 beard entered his nostril. He said louder, “Nothing’s wrong. I can see,” but the words seemed to get caught in the beard. “Nothing, no, no. I can see great,” he said louder, then under his breath because the words seemed wrong. “Nothing’s wrong, can’t you see? Nothing’s wrong. I can see you.” Worried, he approached Belinda and asked if she remembered his line. Balling her hand into a fist, Belinda warned, “Sucka, I’m gonna bury your ugly face in the ground if you mess up.” **F**

“I won’t,” Robert said as he walked away. He bit a nail and looked into the barrel of toys. A clown’s mask stared back at him. He prayed that his line would come back to him. He would hate to disappoint his teacher 130 and didn’t like the thought of his face being rubbed into spiky grass.

The curtain parted slightly, and the principal came out smiling onto the stage. She said some words about pioneer history and then, stern faced, warned the audience not to scrape the chairs on the just-waxed floor. The principal then introduced Mrs. Bunnin, who told the audience about how they had rehearsed for weeks.

Meanwhile, the class stood quietly in place with lunchtime spaghetti on their breath. They were ready. Belinda had swallowed her gum because she knew this was for real. The snowflakes clumped together and began howling.

E MONITOR

Think about how Robert feels the day before the play. How might this affect his performance?

F PLOT: RISING ACTION

How has the tension increased now that it is the day of the play?