

Level **E**

FOCUS
ON

Reading Strategies

Perfection Learning®

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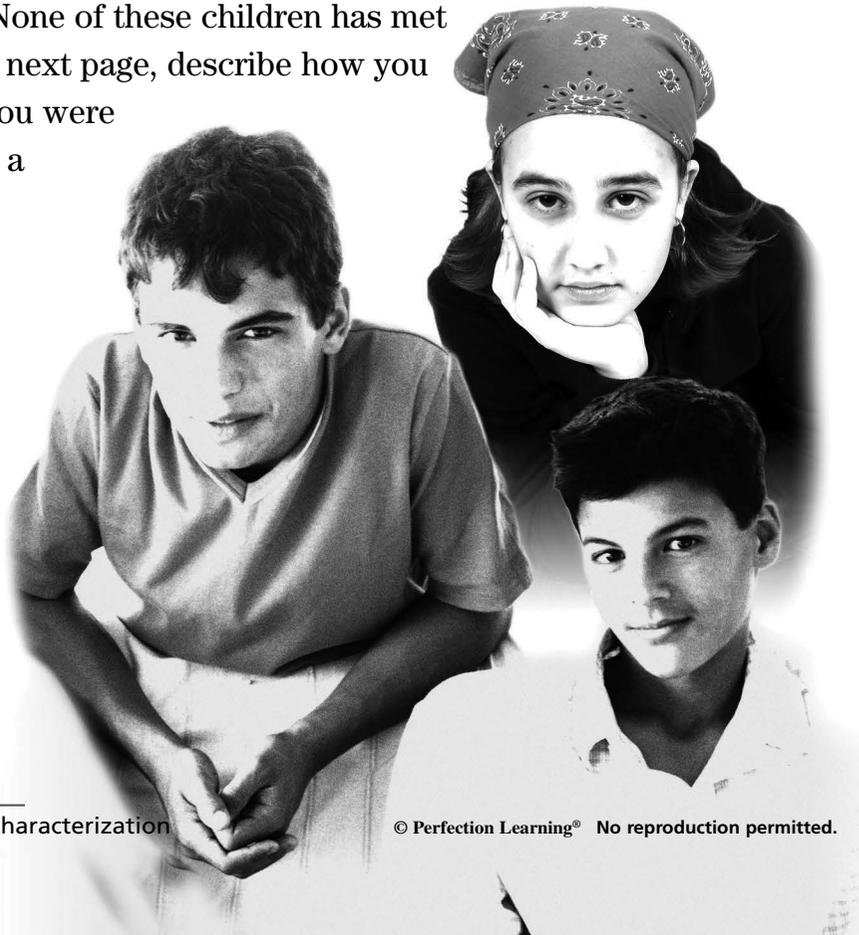
Carlie

from

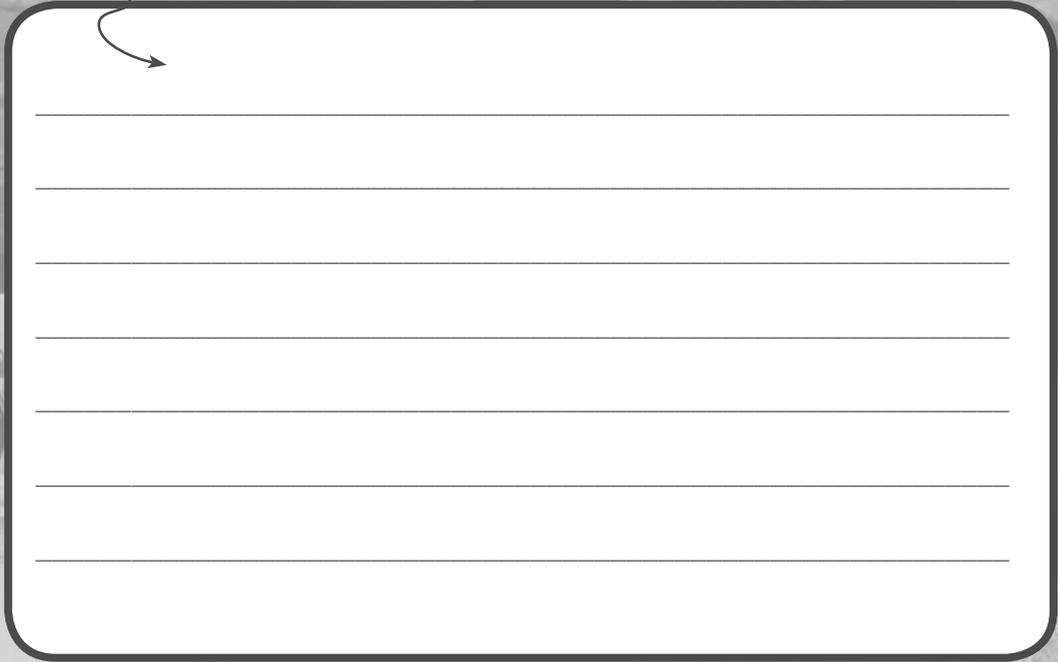
The Pinballs

• *Novel Excerpt*

Heads Up Authors let you as a reader know what characters are like by telling you directly, by letting the characters reveal themselves to you by what they say and do, and by showing how other characters react to them. In “Carlie,” which is an excerpt from the novel *The Pinballs*, the author introduces you to three children who are going to live together as part of a foster family. None of these children has met before. On the next page, describe how you would feel if you were placed in such a situation.



How I Would Feel



Even though this is a short selection, you will get a good picture of these children, especially the girl Carlie, both by what the author tells you about them and by what they reveal about themselves through their conversation. As you read this selection, answer the Think-Along Questions, which will help you focus your thinking on understanding *characterization*. Also, as you read, circle or highlight any words you don't know.

Carlie from The Pinballs

by Betsy Byars

1 Carlie had been suspicious of people since the day she was born. She swore she could remember being dropped on the floor by the doctor who delivered her.

2 “You weren’t dropped,” her mother had told her.

3 “All right then, why is my face so flat? Was I ironed?”

4 Carlie also claimed that when she was two months old a baby-sitter had stolen a golden cross from around her neck.

5 “No baby-sitter stole a gold cross from you,” her mother had told her.

6 “All right then, where is it?”

Do you think Carlie can remember these things? Explain.

7 Carlie believed everyone was out to do her in, and she had disliked Mrs. Mason, the foster mother, as soon as she had seen her standing in the doorway.

8 “I knew she’d have on an apron,” Carlie said to the social worker. “She’s trying to copy herself after Mrs. Walton—unsuccessfully, I might add.”

9 “Maybe she had on the apron because she was cooking, Carlie.”

10 “I should be the social worker. I’m not fooled by things like aprons.”

Why is Carlie distrustful of Mrs. Mason’s apron?

11 She also didn’t like the Masons’ living room. “This is right out of ‘Leave it to Beaver,’ ” she said.

She especially distrusted the row of photographs over the fireplace. Seventeen pictures of—Carlie guessed—seventeen foster children.

12 “Well, my picture’s not going up there,” she grumbled to herself. “And nobody better snap me when I’m not looking either.” She sat.

13 Mrs. Mason waited until “Young and the Restless” was over and then said, “Carlie?”

14 “I’m still here.”

15 “Well, come on and have some lunch. Then afterward you can help me get the boys’ room ready.”

16 Carlie turned. She looked interested for the first time. “The boys?” she asked. “There’re going to be some boys here?”

17 “Yes, two boys are coming this afternoon—Thomas J and Harvey.”

18 “How old?”

19 “Eight and thirteen.”

20 “Oh, boo, too young.” Carlie got up from the footstool. “What’s wrong with them?”

21 “Wrong with them?”

22 “Yeah, why do they have to be here? I’m here because I got a bum stepfather. What’s their trouble?”

23 “Well, I guess they’ll have to tell you that.”

24 Carlie lifted her hair up off her neck. “How about the thirteen-year-old?” she asked. “What’s he like? Big for his age, I hope.”

25 “He has two broken legs. That’s about all I can tell you.

26 “Well,” Carlie said, “that lets out dancing.”

How would you describe Carlie so far?

continued

Carlie from The Pinballs continued

27 Carlie was sitting in front of the television when Harvey arrived. He had to be carried in because of his legs. They set the wheelchair down by Carlie's footstool.

28 She looked around. "What happened to your legs?" she asked. She was interested in medical matters.

29 He said, "Nothing."

30 "Well, *something* must have happened. They don't just put casts on your legs for the fun of it. In fact they *won't* put casts on your legs unless you've had a real accident. I know, because a friend of mine tried to get a cast put on her ankle so she wouldn't have to be in Junior Olympics, and they wouldn't do it." She waited, then she said, "So what happened?"

31 There was a long pause. Harvey looked down at his legs. In his mind the shiny Grand Am lunged over him again. He felt sick. He said, "If you must know, I broke my legs playing football."

32 He wished it had happened that way. A boy at school had broken his ankle playing football, and everyone in school had autographed his cast. Girls had even kissed the cast and left their lipstick prints.

33 Harvey's casts were as white as snow. He wished he had thought to forge some names on them. "Love and kisses from Linda." "Best wishes to a wonderful English student from Miss Howell."

Why do you think Harvey didn't have any names on his cast?

34 Carlie was still looking at him, eyeing the casts, his toes sticking out the end. Then she glanced up at his face.

35 “What position were you playing?”

36 Harvey hesitated. “Quarterback,” he said.

37 Carlie snorted. “You’re no quarterback. I’ve seen Joe Namath in person.” She looked him over. “If you were playing football at all, you were probably the ball.”

38 Harvey kept looking at his legs.

39 Carlie decided to give him one more chance. “So what really happened?”

40 “I was playing football,” he insisted.

41 “Listen,” Carlie said. “This is one of my favorite shows, so if you’re going to tell me a bunch of big lies about what happened to your legs, well, I’ll just go back to watching my show.”

42 “Go back to watching it,” Harvey said.

What do you think really happened to Harvey’s legs?



Make Sense of Words

Sometimes a word that you usually mean to apply to just one instance can be expanded to become a more far-reaching description of someone's personality. Carlie is described as being "**suspicious** of people since the day she was born." Fill in the chart below to analyze the word **suspicious** and to gain more understanding of Carlie's character.

suspicious

base word: **suspect** (verb)

suffix: **-ious**

Dictionary definition

Dictionary definition

Definition of **suspicious** in your own words

Synonyms
(words meaning the same)

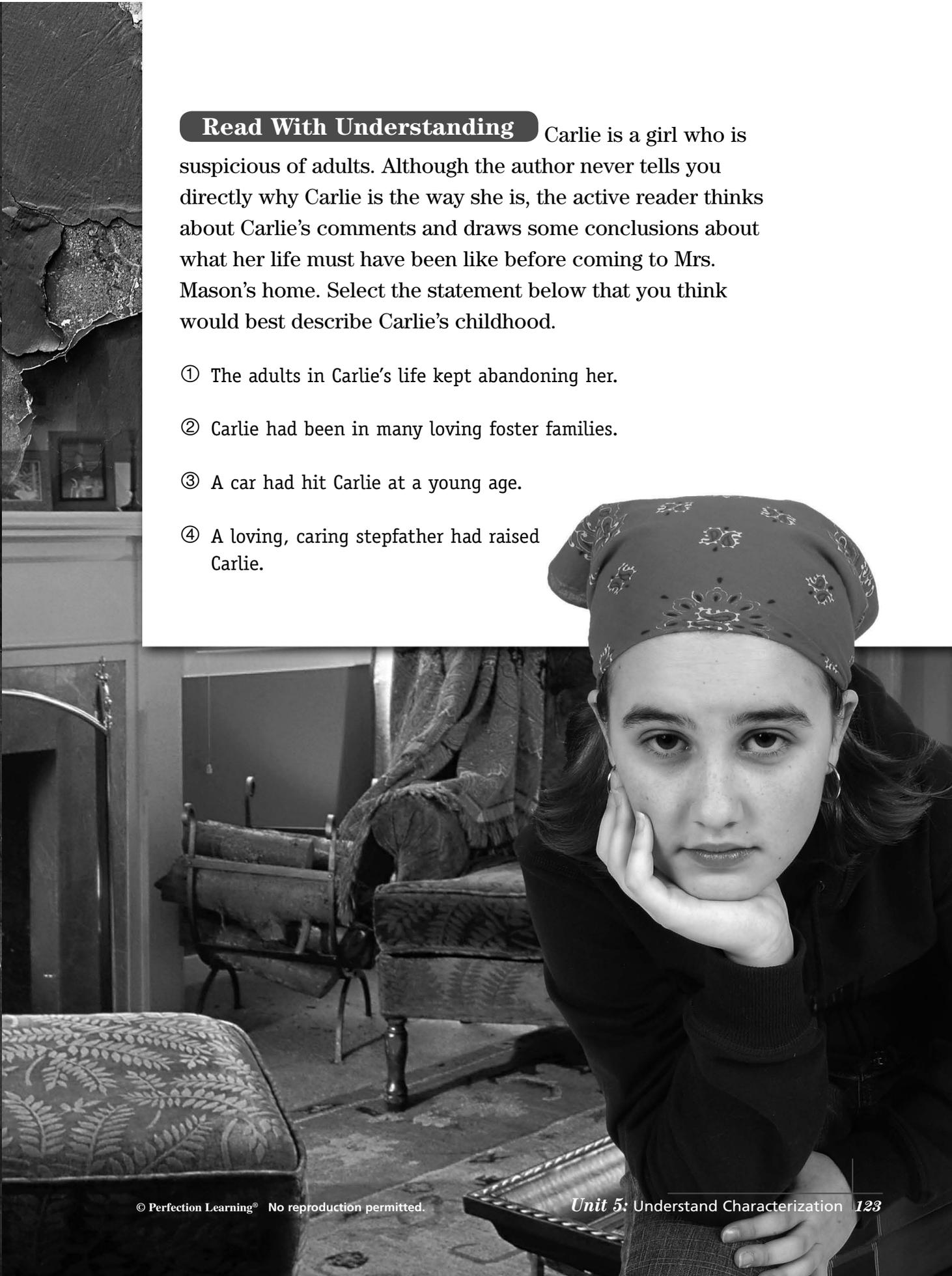
Antonyms
(words meaning the opposite)

Now look back at any words that you circled in the story. Could you use any of these techniques to figure out what those words mean?

Read With Understanding

Carlie is a girl who is suspicious of adults. Although the author never tells you directly why Carlie is the way she is, the active reader thinks about Carlie's comments and draws some conclusions about what her life must have been like before coming to Mrs. Mason's home. Select the statement below that you think would best describe Carlie's childhood.

- ① The adults in Carlie's life kept abandoning her.
- ② Carlie had been in many loving foster families.
- ③ A car had hit Carlie at a young age.
- ④ A loving, caring stepfather had raised Carlie.



Understand by Seeing It

Think about Carlie's personality and the comments she makes as she moves into her new foster home. Then look at the list of adjectives, or describing words, listed below. Five of these fit the character of Carlie, while five do not. Write the words that describe Carlie on the lines surrounding her name. Check the dictionary if there are any words you don't know.

trusting
curious
sweet
suspicious
troubled

kind
stubborn
sarcastic
ordinary
pleasing

