

Girl, 1963, by Roy Lichtenstein. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

Analyzing Visuals Viewing and Interpreting Does the woman in this painting remind you of Melinda Alice? Why or why not?

Read with a Purpose

Read this story to find out what Melinda Alice does with the wishes she is granted.

Those Three Wishes

by **Judith Gorog**

No one ever said that Melinda Alice was nice. That wasn't the word used. No, she was clever, even witty. She was called—never to her face, however—Melinda Malice.¹ Melinda Alice was clever and cruel. Her mother, when she thought about it at all, hoped Melinda would grow out of it. To her father, Melinda's very good grades mattered.

It was Melinda Alice, back in the eighth grade, who had labeled the shy, myopic² new girl "Contamination" and was the first to pretend that anything or anyone touched by the new girl had to be cleaned, inoculated,³ or avoided. High school had merely given Melinda Alice greater scope for her talents.

The surprising thing about Melinda Alice was her power; no one trusted her, but no one avoided her either. She was always

Reading Focus

Analyzing Details Details that reveal the time and place of the story are "back in the eighth grade" and "High school."

1. **malice** (MAL ihs): a wish to hurt others; ill will.

2. **myopic** (my AHP ihk): nearsighted.

3. **inoculated** (ih NAHK yuh layt ihd): vaccinated.

included, always in the middle. If you had seen her, pretty and witty, in the center of a group of students walking past your house, you'd have thought, "There goes a natural leader."

Melinda Alice had left for school early. She wanted to study alone in a quiet spot she had because there was going to be a big math test, and Melinda Alice was not prepared. That mattered; so Melinda Alice walked to school alone, planning her studies. She didn't usually notice nature much, so she nearly stepped on a beautiful snail that was making its way across the sidewalk.

"Ugh. Yucky thing," thought Melinda Alice, then stopped. Not wanting to step on the snail accidentally was one thing, but now she lifted her shoe to crush it.

"Please don't," said the snail.

"Why not?" retorted Melinda Alice.

"I'll give you three wishes," replied the snail evenly.

"Agreed," said Melinda Alice. "My first wish is that my next," she paused a split second, "my next thousand wishes come true." She smiled triumphantly and opened her bag to take out a small notebook and pencil to keep track.

Melinda Alice was sure she heard the snail say, "What a clever girl," as it made it to the safety of an ivy bed beside the sidewalk.

During the rest of the walk to school, Melinda was occupied with wonderful ideas. She would have beautiful clothes. "Wish number two, that I will always be perfectly dressed," and she was just that. True, her new outfit was not a lot different from the one she had worn leaving the house, but that only meant that Melinda Alice liked her own taste.

After thinking awhile, she wrote, "Wish number three. I wish for pierced ears and small gold earrings." Her father had not allowed Melinda to have pierced ears, but now she had them anyway. She felt her new earrings and shook her beautiful hair in delight. "I can have anything: stereo, tapes, TV videodisc, moped, car, anything! All my life!" She hugged her books to herself in delight.

By the time she reached school, Melinda was almost an altruist;⁴ she could wish for peace. Then she wondered, "Is the snail that

Literary Focus

Plot and Setting Here the writer explains Melinda Alice's **conflict**—she is not prepared for her math test—and describes the **setting**—a sidewalk on the way to school.

Reading Focus

Summarizing Here's one way to summarize what has happened: "Melinda Alice almost steps on a snail, who offers her three wishes. Her first wish is to be granted her next thousand wishes."

Reading Focus

Tracking Story Events Melinda Alice has now made three wishes: to have a thousand wishes, to be perfectly dressed, and to have pierced ears and earrings.

4. **altruist** (AL troo ihst): person who helps others without expecting anything in return.

Literary Focus

Plot Melinda Alice makes her final wish here at the **climax** of the story—the point when we know what will happen. But the **resolution**, or final part of the story, is left to your imagination.

powerful?” She felt her ears, looked at her perfect blouse, skirt, jacket, shoes. “I could make ugly people beautiful, cure cripples . . .” She stopped. The wave of altruism had washed past. “I could pay people back who deserve it!” Melinda Alice looked at the school, at all the kids. She had an enormous sense of power. “They all have to do what I want now.” She walked down the crowded halls to her locker. Melinda Alice could be sweet; she could be witty. She could—The bell rang for homeroom. Melinda Alice stashed her books, slammed the locker shut, and just made it to her seat.

“Hey, Melinda Alice,” whispered Fred. “You know that big math test next period?”

“Oh, no,” grimaced Melinda Alice. Her thoughts raced; “That stupid snail made me late, and I forgot to study.”

“I’ll blow it,” she groaned aloud. “I wish I were dead.”

Read with a Purpose What do you think about the way Melinda Alice handles her wishes?

MEET THE WRITER

Judith Gorog

(1938–)

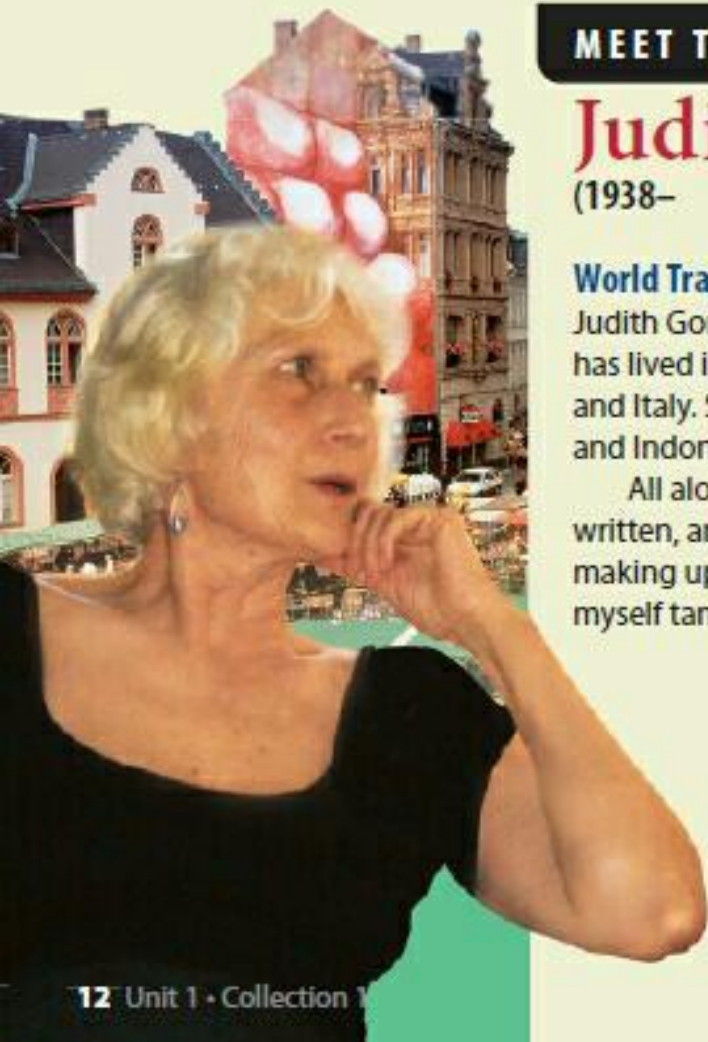
World Traveler

Judith Gorog has been traveling all her life. Born in Wisconsin, she has lived in many parts of the United States and also in Germany and Italy. She has traveled far and wide—to Peru, Japan, Europe, and Indonesia.

All along the way, Judith wrote stories. She says, “I have always written, and began to write stories for children when I was a child, making up stories and plays and rewriting the Greek myths with myself taming Pegasus.”

Think About the Writer

Based on the information above, how would you describe the author?



Into Action: Story Map

"Those Three Wishes" is a very short story with a dramatic climax. Fill in a story map like the one below to summarize the story.

<p><i>Characters:</i> Melinda Alice & snail</p>
<p><i>Conflict:</i></p>
<p><i>Major story events:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p><i>Climax:</i></p>
<p><i>Resolution:</i></p>

Talk About . . .

1. With a partner, discuss the plot and setting of "Those Three Wishes." Try to use each Academic Vocabulary word listed at the right at least once in your discussion.

Write About . . .

Answer the following questions about "Those Three Wishes."

2. Using the structure in your story map above, write a summary of the story's plot.
3. Would the story's outcome have been more effective if it had included a resolution? Why or why not?
4. What theme, or insight about life, does the story reveal?

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

The short stories in Collection 1 have interesting plots and settings. The Writing Focus activities on the Preparing to Read pages will guide you in understanding how writers construct their plots and settings. On the Applying Your Skills pages, you'll have a chance to practice using those writers' techniques.

Academic Vocabulary for Collection 1

Talking and Writing About Stories

Academic Vocabulary is the language you use to write and talk about literature. Use these words to discuss the stories you read in this collection. The words are underlined throughout the collection.

effective (uh FEHK tihv) *adj.*: bringing about a desired result.
I found the ending of the story to be surprising but effective.

outcome (OWT kuhm) *n.*: result; ending. *The outcome of this story is left to the reader's imagination.*

reveal (rih VEEL) *v.*: make known. *Melinda Alice's cruel actions reveal her personality.*

structure (STRUHK chuhr) *n.*: arrangement of parts. *A plot diagram shows the structure of the story.*

Your Turn



Copy these Academic Vocabulary words into your *Reader/Writer Notebook*, and try to use them as you answer questions about the stories in the collection.

