Mother and Daughter by Gary Soto

LITERARY FOCUS: CHARACTER TRAITS
What’s your best friend like? funny? a little impatient? a neat freak? The words you choose to describe your friend also describe his or her character traits. Character traits are the qualities that are revealed by a character’s appearance, spoken words, actions, and thoughts. Character traits are also revealed by how a character affects other characters in the story.

Use the space below to list some character traits of your favorite book or television character.

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<th>Character Traits</th>
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READING SKILLS: MAKING INFERENCES
Imagine that you are eating lunch in your backyard. You leave your sandwich on the picnic table and go to the house for a glass of water. When you return to your lunch, your sandwich is gone and your dog has peanut butter on his nose. What do you think happened? You can use the evidence you have to make an inference, or educated guess, that your dog swiped your sandwich. In the same way you can use story details to make inferences about characters in a story.

As you read “Mother and Daughter,” collect story details to help you make inferences about the characters.
matinees (mat’n-äz’) n.: afternoon performances of a play or a movie.

Yollie and her mother got along well enough to go to matinees together at the local theater almost every Saturday afternoon.

antics (an’tiks) n.: playful or silly acts.

People who witnessed Mrs. Moreno’s antics couldn’t help laughing.

meager (mē’gər) adj.: slight; small amount.

Mrs. Moreno remembers that her parents worked hard for their meager salaries.

sophisticated (sə-fis’tə-kāt’id) adj.: worldly; elegant and refined.

Yollie admired the way sophisticated people in New York dressed.

tirade (tî’räd’) n.: long, scolding speech.

Yollie felt bad about her angry tirade against her mom.

UNDERSTANDING WORD ORIGINS

A word’s etymology (et’a-mäl’ə-jē) tells you what language the word comes from and how the word has developed through different languages over many years. An etymology is usually listed in brackets or parentheses after the word itself in a dictionary. Definitions of symbols and abbreviations in the front or back of the dictionary will help you read the etymology. For example, this common symbol, “<,” means “comes from” or “derived from.”

Take a look at the etymology of student to understand the word’s history. As you read the story that follows, look for sidenotes that help explain the etymology of words.

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<td>student &lt; L studere, to study</td>
<td>Student comes from the Latin word studere, which means “to study.”</td>
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Yollie’s mother, Mrs. Moreno, was a large woman who wore a muumuu and butterfly-shaped glasses. She liked to water her lawn in the evening and wave at low-riders, who would stare at her behind their smoky sunglasses and laugh. Now and then a low-rider from Belmont Avenue would make his car jump and shout “Mamacita!” But most of the time they just stared and wondered how she got so large.

Mrs. Moreno had a strange sense of humor. Once, Yollie and her mother were watching a late-night movie called *They Came to Look*. It was about creatures from the underworld who had climbed through molten lava to walk the earth. But Yollie, who had played soccer all day with the kids next door, was too tired to be scared. Her eyes closed but sprang open when her mother screamed, “Look, Yollie! Oh, you missed a scary part. The guy’s face was all ugly!”
But Yollie couldn’t keep her eyes open. They fell shut again and stayed shut, even when her mother screamed and slammed a heavy palm on the arm of her chair.

“Mom, wake me up when the movie’s over so I can go to bed,” mumbled Yollie.

“OK, Yollie, I wake you,” said her mother through a mouthful of popcorn.

But after the movie ended, instead of waking her daughter, Mrs. Moreno laughed under her breath, turned the TV and lights off, and tiptoed to bed. Yollie woke up in the middle of the night and didn’t know where she was. For a moment she thought she was dead. Maybe something from the underworld had lifted her from her house and carried her into the earth’s belly. She blinked her sleepy eyes, looked around at the darkness, and called, “Mom? Mom, where are you?” But there was no answer, just the throbbing hum of the refrigerator.

Finally, Yollie’s grogginess cleared and she realized her mother had gone to bed, leaving her on the couch. Another of her little jokes.

But Yollie wasn’t laughing. She tiptoed into her mother’s bedroom with a glass of water and set it on the nightstand next to the alarm clock. The next morning, Yollie woke to screams. When her mother reached to turn off the alarm, she had overturned the glass of water.

Yollie burned her mother’s morning toast and gloated. “Ha! Ha! I got you back. Why did you leave me on the couch when I told you to wake me up?”

Despite their jokes, mother and daughter usually got along. They watched bargain matinees together, and played croquet in the summer and checkers in the winter. Mrs. Moreno encouraged Yollie to study hard because she wanted her daughter to be a doctor. She bought Yollie a desk, a

INFER

Re-read lines 21–22. What can you learn about Mrs. Moreno from the way she speaks?

RETELL

Re-read lines 23–32. What has happened to Yollie?

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Pause at line 43. Think about Yollie’s response to her mother’s practical joke. What character trait do Yollie and Mrs. Moreno have in common?

VOCABULARY

matinees (mat’n-äz’) n.: afternoon performances of a play or a movie.

Matinee is from the French matin, meaning “morning.”
typewriter, and a lamp that cut glare so her eyes would not grow tired from hours of studying.

Yollie was slender as a tulip, pretty, and one of the smartest kids at Saint Theresa’s. She was captain of crossing guards, an altar girl, and a whiz in the school’s monthly spelling bees.

“Tienes que estudiar mucho,” Mrs. Moreno said every time she propped her work-weary feet on the hassock. “You have to study a lot, then you can get a good job and take care of me.”

“Yes, Mama,” Yollie would respond, her face buried in a book. If she gave her mother any sympathy, she would begin her stories about how she had come with her family from Mexico with nothing on her back but a sack with three skirts, all of which were too large by the time she crossed the border because she had lost weight from not having enough to eat.

Everyone thought Yollie’s mother was a riot. Even the nuns laughed at her antics. Her brother Raul, a nightclub owner, thought she was funny enough to go into show business.
But there was nothing funny about Yollie needing a new outfit for the eighth-grade fall dance. They couldn’t afford one. It was late October, with Christmas around the corner, and their dented Chevy Nova had gobbled up almost one hundred dollars in repairs.

“We don’t have the money,” said her mother, genuinely sad because they couldn’t buy the outfit, even though there was a little money stashed away for college. Mrs. Moreno remembered her teenage years and her hardworking parents, who picked grapes and oranges, and chopped beets and cotton for meager pay around Kerman. Those were the days when “new clothes” meant limp and out-of-style dresses from Saint Vincent de Paul.

The best Mrs. Moreno could do was buy Yollie a pair of black shoes with velvet bows and fabric dye to color her white summer dress black.

“We can color your dress so it will look brand-new,” her mother said brightly, shaking the bottle of dye as she ran hot water into a plastic dish tub. She poured the black liquid into the tub and stirred it with a pencil. Then, slowly and carefully, she lowered the dress into the tub.

Yollie couldn’t stand to watch. She knew it wouldn’t work. It would be like the time her mother stirred up a batch of molasses for candy apples on Yollie’s birthday. She’d dipped the apples into the goo and swirled them and seemed to taunt Yollie by singing “Las Mañanitas” to her. When she was through, she set the apples on wax paper. They were hard as rocks and hurt the kids’ teeth. Finally, they had a contest to see who could break the apples open by throwing them against the side of the house. The apples shattered like grenades, sending the kids scurrying for cover, and in an odd way the birthday party turned out to be a success. At least everyone went home happy.
To Yollie’s surprise, the dress came out shiny black. It looked brand-new and sophisticated, like what people in New York wear. She beamed at her mother, who hugged Yollie and said, “See, what did I tell you?”

The dance was important to Yollie because she was in love with Ernie Castillo, the third-best speller in the class. She bathed, dressed, did her hair and nails, and primped until her mother yelled, “All right already.” Yollie sprayed her neck and wrists with Mrs. Moreno’s Avon perfume and bounced into the car.

Mrs. Moreno let Yollie out in front of the school. She waved and told her to have a good time but behave herself, then roared off, blue smoke trailing from the tail pipe of the old Nova.

Yollie ran into her best friend, Janice. They didn’t say it, but each thought the other was the most beautiful girl at the dance; the boys would fall over themselves asking them to dance.

The evening was warm but thick with clouds. Gusts of wind picked up the paper lanterns hanging in the trees and swung them, blurring the night with reds and yellows. The lanterns made the evening seem romantic, like a scene from a movie. Everyone danced, sipped punch, and stood in knots of threes and fours, talking. Sister Kelly got up and
jitterbugged with some kid’s father. When the record ended, students broke into applause.

Janice had her eye on Frankie Ledesma, and Yollie, who kept smoothing her dress down when the wind picked up, had her eye on Ernie. It turned out that Ernie had his mind on Yollie, too. He ate a handful of cookies nervously, then asked her for a dance.

“Sure,” she said, nearly throwing herself into his arms. They danced two fast ones before they got a slow one. As they circled under the lanterns, rain began falling, lightly at first. Yollie loved the sound of the raindrops ticking against the leaves. She leaned her head on Ernie’s shoulder, though his sweater was scratchy. He felt warm and tender. Yollie could tell that he was in love, and with her, of course. The dance continued successfully, romantically, until it began to pour.

“Everyone, let’s go inside—and, boys, carry in the table and the record player,” Sister Kelly commanded.

The girls and boys raced into the cafeteria. Inside, the girls, drenched to the bone, hurried to the restrooms to brush their hair and dry themselves. One girl cried because her velvet dress was ruined. Yollie felt sorry for her and helped her dry the dress off with paper towels, but it was no use. The dress was ruined.

Yollie went to a mirror. She looked a little gray now that her mother’s makeup had washed away but not as bad as some of the other girls. She combed her damp hair, careful not to pull too hard. She couldn’t wait to get back to Ernie.

Yollie bent over to pick up a bobby pin, and shame spread across her face. A black puddle was forming at her feet. Drip, black drip. Drip, black drip. The dye was falling from her dress like black tears. Yollie stood up. Her dress was now the color of ash. She looked around the room. The other girls, unaware of Yollie’s problem, were busy...
grooming themselves. What could she do? Everyone would laugh. They would know she dyed an old dress because she couldn’t afford a new one. She hurried from the restroom with her head down, across the cafeteria floor and out the door. She raced through the storm, crying as the rain mixed with her tears and ran into twig-choked gutters.

When she arrived home, her mother was on the couch eating cookies and watching TV.

“How was the dance, m’ija? Come watch the show with me. It’s really good.”

Yollie stomped, head down, to her bedroom. She undressed and threw the dress on the floor.

Her mother came into the room. “What’s going on? What’s all the racket, baby?”

“The dress. It’s cheap! It’s no good!” Yollie kicked the dress at her mother and watched it land in her hands. Mrs. Moreno studied it closely but couldn’t see what was wrong. “What’s the matter? It’s just a bit wet.”

“The dye came out, that’s what.”

Mrs. Moreno looked at her hands and saw the grayish dye puddling in the shallow lines of her palms. Poor baby, she thought, her brow darkening as she made a sad face.
She wanted to tell her daughter how sorry she was, but she knew it wouldn’t help. She walked back to the living room and cried.

The next morning, mother and daughter stayed away from each other. Yollie sat in her room turning the pages of an old Seventeen, while her mother watered her plants with a Pepsi bottle.

“Drink, my children,” she said loud enough for Yollie to hear. She let the water slurp into pots of coleus and cacti. “Water is all you need. My daughter needs clothes, but I don’t have no money.”

Yollie tossed her Seventeen on her bed. She was embarrassed at last night’s tirade. It wasn’t her mother’s fault that they were poor.

When they sat down together for lunch, they felt awkward about the night before. But Mrs. Moreno had made a fresh stack of tortillas and cooked up a pan of chile verde, and that broke the ice. She licked her thumb and smacked her lips.

“You know, honey, we gotta figure a way to make money,” Yollie’s mother said. “You and me. We don’t have to be poor. Remember the Garcias. They made this stupid little tool that fixes cars. They moved away because they’re rich. That’s why we don’t see them no more.”

“What can we make?” asked Yollie. She took another tortilla and tore it in half.

“Maybe a screwdriver that works on both ends? Something like that.” The mother looked around the room for ideas, but then shrugged. “Let’s forget it. It’s better to get an education. If you get a good job and have spare time then maybe you can invent something.” She rolled her tongue over her lips and cleared her throat. “The county fair hires people. We can get a job there. It will be here next week.”
Yollie hated the idea. What would Ernie say if he saw her pitching hay at the cows? How could she go to school smelling like an armful of chickens? “No, they wouldn’t hire us,” she said.

The phone rang. Yollie lurched from her chair to answer it, thinking it would be Janice wanting to know why she had left. But it was Ernie wondering the same thing. When he found out she wasn’t mad at him, he asked if she would like to go to a movie.

“I’ll ask,” Yollie said, smiling. She covered the phone with her hand and counted to ten. She uncovered the receiver and said, “My mom says it’s OK. What are we going to see?”

After Yollie hung up, her mother climbed, grunting, onto a chair to reach the top shelf in the hall closet. She wondered why she hadn’t done it earlier. She reached behind a stack of towels and pushed her chubby hand into the cigar box where she kept her secret stash of money.

“I’ve been saving a little money every month,” said Mrs. Moreno. “For you, m’ija.” Her mother held up five twenties, a blossom of green that smelled sweeter than flowers on that Saturday. They drove to Macy’s and bought a blouse, shoes, and a skirt that would not bleed in rain or any other kind of weather.
Character Traits Chart  Writers bring characters to life by describing how the characters look, talk, act, and think. Sometimes a writer directly describes a character’s traits. For example, a writer might tell you that so-and-so is kind, sympathetic, or tough. Often, however, you have to make inferences about the characters based on details the writer provides.

Select one of the characters from “Mother and Daughter,” and complete this chart with details you find in the story. Then, review those details and list the character’s traits in the box.

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<th>Character:</th>
<th>Character Traits</th>
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<td>Appearance</td>
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<td>Speech</td>
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<td>Other Characters’ Reactions</td>
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Mother and Daughter

VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

A. Word Origins  The partial etymologies given below tell the story of three of the Word Bank words. Select the vocabulary word that matches each etymology, and write the word in the blank provided.

1. < G *sophistes*, meaning “wise man” ________________

2. < Fr *matin*, “morning” ________________

3. < L *macer*, “lean; thin” ________________

B. Reading Comprehension  Answer each question below.

1. What is Mrs. Moreno’s personality like? ________________

2. Why is Yollie upset about the upcoming dance? ________________

3. Why does Yollie leave the dance early? ________________

4. What does Mrs. Moreno do to cheer Yollie up after the dance? ________________
4. The crocodile’s conscience led him to tell the monkey about his wife’s plan. That inner voice, the voice that told the crocodile right from wrong, saved the life of his monkey friend.

B. 1. The characters include a monkey, a crocodile, and the crocodile’s wife.
2. The crocodile’s wife wants to eat the monkey’s heart, but the crocodile doesn’t want her to because the monkey is his friend.
3. The monkey does not get killed. The monkey tricks the crocodile into taking him back to his tree.

Mother and Daughter, page 60

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INFER
Possible response: They thought she looked funny. They yelled “Mamacita!” meaning “little mama,” as if they found her attractive. They were showing friendly respect.

IDENTIFY
The detail that shows direct characterization is “Mrs. Moreno had a strange sense of humor.” Details that show indirect characterization are “...Yollie and her mother were watching a late-night movie called They Came to Look. It was about creatures from the underworld” and “her mother screamed, ‘Look, Yollie! Oh, you missed a scary part.’”

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INFER
Possible response: English is probably not her first language. She is probably not well educated.

RETELL
She has woken up in the living room in the middle of the night, and she is confused about where she is.

COMPARE & CONTRAST
Yollie and her mother both have a good sense of humor.

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COMPARE & CONTRAST
How Yollie and her mother are alike: They both like movies and games. How Yollie and her mother are different: Yollie is slender; her mother is not. Yollie is smart in school; her mother probably was not.

WORD STUDY
Students should circle “study a lot.”

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INFER
Possible response: It reminds her of her own teenage years when she did not have new clothes.

IDENTIFY
To give Yollie a “new” dress, Mrs. Moreno dyes an old white dress black.

RETELL
The candy apples Yollie’s mother made were too hard to eat, so the kids had a contest to see who could break them open by throwing them against the house.

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IDENTIFY
The dance is important because Yollie is in love with Ernie Castillo.

IDENTIFY
Students should underline details such as “warm but thick with clouds. Gusts of wind picked up the paper lanterns hanging in the trees and swung them...like a scene from a movie”; “Everyone danced, sipped punch, and stood in knots...talking”; “Sister Kelly got up and jitterbugged with some kid’s father” and “students broke into applause.”

WORD STUDY
Context clues to the meaning of the word jitterbug are “Everyone danced” and “got up...with some kid’s father. When the record ended.” The jitterbug is a kind of dance.

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PREDICT
Answers will vary. Possible predictions: The rain might not affect her evening at all; the rain might ruin her evening by messing up her hair; if her dress gets wet, the dye might run out of it.

INFER
Yollie’s feelings and actions are described by the words “felt sorry for her” and “helped her dry.” These details reveal that Yollie is a caring person.

IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT
The rain is washing the dye out of Yollie’s dress, causing a black puddle of water to form at Yollie’s feet.

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CONNECT
Answers will vary. Some students may respond that Yollie shouldn’t be ashamed of her dress because clothing is relatively unimportant and being poor is nothing to be ashamed of. Others may say that it’s embarrassing because the dress was a makeover and not new.
Words that describe what Mrs. Moreno is thinking, what she looks like, and what she is doing include “Poor baby, she thought,” “made a sad face,” and “walked back to the living room and cried.” These details show that Mrs. Moreno is sympathetic, caring, and loving.

Possible response: Her words reveal that she is hopeful, practical, imaginative.

Ernie shows he’s a nice boy by calling Yollie to find out why she left the dance and to ask if she was mad at him. Then he asks her to go to a movie. Mrs. Moreno shows her love for Yollie by using her savings to buy her daughter some new clothes.

Answers will vary. Sample answer:

Character: Mrs. Moreno
Character Traits: funny, caring, loving
Appearance: large, wears a muumuu and butterfly-shaped glasses
Speech: “I’ve been saving a little money every month... For you, m’ija.”
Actions: She walked back to the living room and cried.
Thoughts and Feelings: She wanted to tell her daughter how sorry she was, but she knew it wouldn’t help.
Other Characters’ Reactions: Everyone thought Yollie’s mother was a riot. Even the nuns laughed at her antics.

A Rice Sandwich, page 73

Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Narrator Detector (page 77)

Clue 1: my
Clue 2: I
Clue 3: my
Clue 4: we

The narrator’s name is in the letter from her mother to Sister Superior.

Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 72)

A. 1. sophisticated
   2. matinees
   3. meager
B. 1. Mrs. Moreno is humorous, loving, down-to-earth.
   2. Yollie doesn’t have a new dress to wear.
   3. Yollie is embarrassed because the dye is washing out of her dress, and she doesn’t want her friends to know she is wearing an old dress.
   4. Mrs. Moreno takes Yollie shopping for new clothes.

Comprehension (page 78)

1. Esperanza, a girl who attends a Catholic school
2. The kids who eat in the canteen live too far from school to go home, or their mothers aren’t at home during the day. Esperanza calls them “special kids.”