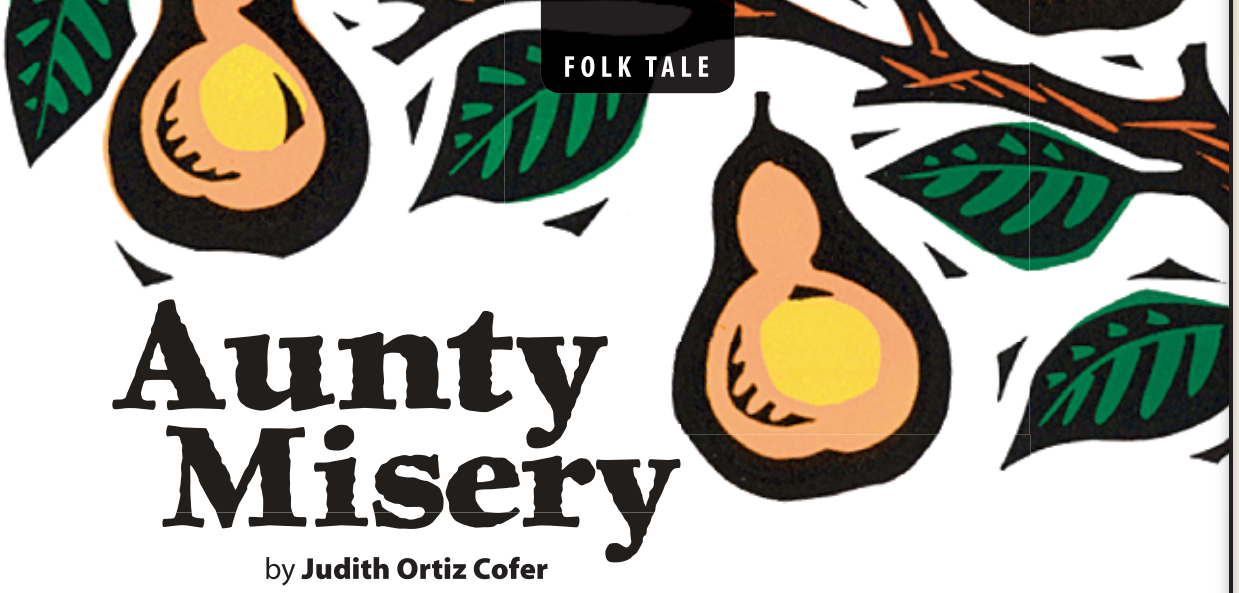


FOLK TALE

# Aunty Misery

by **Judith Ortiz Cofer**

## Read with a Purpose

Read "Aunty Misery" to learn the consequences of a simple wish.

**Preparing to Read** for this selection is on page 89.

## Build Background

"Aunty Misery" is a folk tale, a story that has been passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another. Often, folk tales contain fantastic elements and try to explain why things are the way they are.

This is a story about an old, a very old woman who lived alone in her little hut with no other company than a beautiful pear tree that grew at her door. She spent all her time taking care of this tree. The neighborhood children drove the old woman crazy by stealing her fruit. They would climb her tree, shake its delicate limbs, and run away with armloads of golden pears, yelling insults at *la Tia Miseria*,[1] Aunty Misery, as they called her. A

One day, a traveler stopped at the old woman's hut and asked her for permission to spend the night under her roof. Aunty Misery saw that he had an honest face and bid the pilgrim come in. She fed him and made a bed for him in front of her hearth. In the morning the stranger told her that he would show his gratitude for her hospitality by granting her one wish. B

"There is only one thing that I desire," said Aunty Misery.

"Ask, and it shall be yours," replied the stranger, who was a sorcerer in disguise.

1. **la Tia Miseria** (lah TEE ah mee say REE ah).

A **Read and Discuss** What has the author told us so far?

B **Reading Focus** **Comparing** What similarities do you notice between this story and "The Monkey's Paw"?

**Vocabulary** **hospitality** (hahs puh TAL uh tee) *n.*: friendly or generous treatment of guests.

| Selection Readability | |
|---|---|
| Easily Accessible<br>**Accessible**<br>Challenging | familiar setting, simple dialogue, accessible vocabulary, familiar genre |
| **Lexile** | **1120** |

## Selection Summary

Aunty Misery is given three wishes. She uses them to stop people from disturbing her pear tree. In time, Aunty Misery traps Death in the tree, keeping others from dying as well. Aunty Misery releases Death on the condition that he will never take her.

## Direct Teach

### Think About/Talk About

**Read with a Purpose** Have students read the Read with a Purpose statement. Point out that misery can mean suffering or unhappiness. Ask students to look for several reasons for the main character's name.

### Comprehension

#### A Read and Discuss

***Possible response:*** *There is a lonely old woman who cares for nothing but her pear tree.*

#### B Reading Focus

***Possible response:*** *Both stories include a visitor who brings the power to grant wishes.*

### ? Extend the Discussion

**Interpreting Motives** Why do the children call her Aunty Misery? ***Possible response***: *The children are cruel, and perhaps afraid.*

**Finding Details** How does Aunty Misery treat her visitor? ***Possible response:*** *She feeds him and gives him a bed for the night.*

## Guided Practice

### Model and Apply

- Provide students with copies of the Reading Focus graphic organizer for "Aunty Misery" (**Collection 1 Resources**) or ask them to use a piece of their own paper.
- Tell students that this story contains parallel episodes. Point out that the first visitor has supernatural powers and so does Señor Death.
- **Read-Talk-Write** Have students read to the end of "Aunty Misery." Have students work in pairs to identify story patterns across the texts and parallel episodes located within this story. Then, have students record their findings in their graphic organizers. Possible responses are recorded below.

| | "Aunty Misery" |
|---|---|
| Parallel Episodes | visitors have supernatural powers; characters climb pear tree; Aunty Misery's cleverness |
| Story Patterns | travelers seeking hospitality |

### Think as a Reader/Writer

**Find It in Your Reading** Point out to students the paragraph that begins "Many years passed and there were no deaths …" and have them re-read the sentences discussing which people were unhappy that death no longer came.

**Use It in Your Writing** Tell students to write two sentences about other problems that developed because "death no longer came."

"I wish that anyone who climbs up my pear tree should not be able to come back down until I permit it."

"Your wish is granted," said the stranger, touching the pear tree as he left Aunty Misery's house.

And so it happened that when the children came back to taunt the old woman and to steal her fruit, she stood at her window watching them. Several of them shimmied up the trunk of the pear tree and immediately got stuck to it as if with glue. She let them cry and beg her for a long time before she gave the tree permission to let them go on the condition that they never again steal her fruit, or bother her.

Time passed and both Aunty Misery and her tree grew bent and gnarled with age. One day another traveler stopped at her door. This one looked untrustworthy to her, so before letting him into her home the old woman asked him what he was doing in her village. He answered her in a voice that was dry and hoarse, as if he had swallowed a desert: "I am Death, and I have come to take you with me." C

Thinking fast, Aunty Misery said, "All right, but before I go I would like to pluck some pears from my beloved tree to remember how much pleasure it brought me in this life. But I am a very old woman and cannot climb to the tallest branches where the best fruit is. Will you be so kind as to do it for me?"

With a heavy sigh like wind through a tomb, Señor Death climbed the pear tree. Immediately he became stuck to it as if with glue. And no matter how much he cursed and threatened, Aunty Misery would not allow the tree to release Death.

Many years passed and there were no deaths in the world. The people who make their living from death began to protest loudly. The doctors claimed no one bothered to come in for examinations or treatments anymore, because they did not fear dying; the pharmacists' business suffered too because medicines are, like magic potions, bought to prevent or postpone the inevitable; priests and undertakers were unhappy with the situation also, for obvious reasons. There were also many old folks tired of life who wanted to pass on to the next world to rest from miseries of this one. D

La Tia Miseria was blamed by these people for their troubles, of course. Not wishing to be unfair, the old woman made a deal with her prisoner, Death: if he promised not ever to come for her again, she would give him his freedom. He agreed. And that is why there are two things you can always count on running into in this world: Misery and Death: *La miseria y la muerte*.[2]

2. **y la muerte** (ee lah MWEHR tay).

C **Literary Focus** **Patterns** What parallel episodes can you find in both "Aunty Misery" and "The Monkey's Paw"?

**Vocabulary** **gnarled** (nahrld) *adj.*: covered with knots; twisted.

D **Read and Discuss** What is the connection between Death being stuck in Aunty Misery's tree and what is going on in the rest of the world?

## Differentiating Instruction

### Readers Gaining Proficiency

- Tell students that comparing and contrasting means finding the similarities and differences between stories.
- Remind them that comparing is learning how things are alike and contrasting is learning how they are different.
- Engage students in a class discussion of ways that they compare and contrast in their daily lives.
- Ask students to think about what aspects they would compare while looking for a pair of shoes to purchase. Students may note they compare color, price, and style. Tell students that identifying two pairs of shoes that are similar in color and style but different in price is one way of comparing and contrasting.
- Have students use the same process to compare and contrast short stories. Make sure they identify what is important to compare. In these short stories, that means comparing patterns. Then, students should look to see what is similar and what is different.



**SKILLS FOCUS** **pp. 106–107**

**Literary Skills**
- Analyze subplots and parallel episodes.
- Analyze literary patterns.

**Reading Skills**
- Compare and contrast stories.

**Vocabulary Skills**
- Demonstrate knowledge of literal meanings of words and their usage.

**Writing Skills**
- Write comparison-contrast essays.
- Establish and develop setting.

## Think About/Talk About

### Comprehension

**D Read and Discuss**

***Possible response:*** *Having no deaths in the world was taking its toll on many people and professions — doctors had no patients, pharmacists' businesses suffered, priests and undertakers weren't happy, and some people wanted to pass on.*

### Analysis

**C Literary Focus**

***Possible response:*** *Both stories feature making wishes, and visitors are important in both stories.*

### ? Extend the Discussion

**Characterization** What does Aunty Misery's first wish tell you about her? ***Possible response:*** *Aunty Misery does not care about people or possessions. She just wants to protect her beloved tree.*

**Making Inferences** What does Aunty Misery's deal with Death tell you about her? ***Possible response:*** *Aunty Misery is clever for using what she has to bargain with Death. She wants to be fair to those who are ready to die and those who earn their living by taking care of the dying or dead. This shows that she cares about others, even though she lives by herself with her tree.*

**Summarizing** How was Aunty Misery able to trick Death? ***Possible response:*** *She asked Death to pick her a few pears before leaving, so she could remember how much pleasure the tree brought her. He agreed and became stuck in the tree.*

Review

## Independent Practice

### Reading Focus

***Answers:***

1. *Her first visitor is a sorcerer. He grants her wish that anyone who climbs her tree will not be able to climb down until she permits it.*
2. *She will let him out of the tree if he lets her live.*
3. *Although Aunty Misery seems happy with the result of her wish, many others, including those who made their living off of death, were unhappy with the results.*
4. *Parallel episodes: guests with supernatural powers appear; characters climb trees; Literary patterns: mysterious guests; unfortunate consequences*

### Vocabulary Check

***Answers:***

5. *a*
6. *b*

### Literary Focus

***Possible Responses:***

7. *She uses her wish wisely to improve her life. She uses caution instead of letting Death in her home. She tricks Death and saves her life.*
8. *It explores the idea that death and unhappiness are an integral part of life.*
9. *Without death, doctors, pharmacists, priests, and undertakers would be out of work, and old people who were tired of life could not pass on. The population would increase.*
10. *Parallel episodes include visits by strangers with powers, characters climbing her tree, and Aunty Misery's cleverness.*
11. *Both stories show that people can wish for something that may have negative consequences.*

# Applying Your Skills

Aunty Misery

## Respond and Think Critically

### Reading Focus

#### Quick Check

1. Who is Aunty Misery's first visitor? What wish of hers does he grant?
2. What bargain does Aunty Misery make with her second visitor?

#### Read with a Purpose

3. What happens as a result of Aunty Misery's wish?

#### Reading Skills: Comparing and Contrasting

4. Now, fill in the second column of your chart. Use your chart to answer questions 10 and 11.

| | "The Monkey's Paw" | "Aunty Misery" |
|---|---|---|
| Parallel episodes within a story | three wishes | |
| Literary patterns across stories | mysterious guest arrives<br>magical object | |

#### Vocabulary Check

Match the Vocabulary words with their definitions.

5. **gnarled** **a.** twisted
6. **hospitality** **b.** generosity

### Literary Focus

#### Literary Analysis

7. **Identify** What story clues reveal that Aunty Misery is clever?
8. **Interpret** The folk tale states that there are two things you can always count on in this world: misery and death. What does that saying mean?
9. **Extend** According to the folk tale, what happens in the world when there is no death? What other effects can you imagine if there were no death?

#### Literary Skills: Literary Patterns

10. **Identify** What parallel episodes can you find in "Aunty Misery"?
11. **Interpret** Compare the outcomes of Aunty Misery's wish with those of Mr. White's wishes. What can you conclude about the consequences of human desire?

### Writing Focus

#### Think as a Reader/Writer

**Use It in Your Writing** Cofer uses short, simple sentences in the telling of this folk tale. Choose a setting that intrigues you—it can be imaginary or real. Using Cofer's simple style, try writing a paragraph that describes the setting. Observe the effect of this style. Now, rewrite your paragraph using longer, more complex sentences. How does the overall effect of the description change?

## Writing Focus

**Alternative Prompt for Writers Gaining Proficiency** Students may struggle with rewriting their paragraphs using longer, more complex sentences. Have them use Cofer's simple style to describe the setting, but tell them to eliminate punctuation and add transitional words such as *and*, *so*, and *then* between sentences. Tell students to revise their sentences as needed.

COMPARING TEXTS

# Wrap Up

## The Monkey's Paw / Aunty Misery

### Writing Focus

## Writing a Comparison-Contrast Essay

**Use It in Your Writing** Write an essay comparing the patterns you find within and across "The Monkey's Paw" and "Aunty Misery." To help plan your essay, review the chart you completed after you read each story. The chart will help you focus on story elements that are similar and different. Also, ask yourself these questions:

- How does the pattern of wishes set in motion each story's events?
- What are the outcomes of Mr. White's and Aunty Misery's wishes? How are these outcomes similar and different?
- What does the ending of each story suggest about the consequences of people's desires being fulfilled?

You do not have to write about all of these elements in your essay. Explore the elements that most interest you.

There are two basic ways you can organize the body of your essay:

1. **The Block Method** If you choose this organizational structure, you will discuss one story at a time. Your first few paragraphs might look like this:
   *Paragraph 1:* "The Monkey's Paw" (parallel episodes; other literary patterns; lesson about life)
   *Paragraph 2:* "Aunty Misery" (parallel episodes; other literary patterns; lesson about life)
2. **The Point-by-Point Method** If you use this organizational structure, you will discuss each literary element in turn, explaining how it is used in each story. Your first three paragraphs might look like this:
   *Paragraph 1:* Parallel episodes in "The Monkey's Paw" and in "Aunty Misery"
   *Paragraph 2:* Common literary patterns in "The Monkey's Paw" and in "Aunty Misery"
   *Paragraph 3:* Lessons about life in "The Monkey's Paw" and in "Aunty Misery"

At the end of your essay, tell which story you prefer and why. Which story challenged you more as a reader? Explain your opinions.

### Evaluation Criteria for a Comparison-Contrast Essay

| An effective comparison-contrast essay |
|---|
| • uses the opening paragraph to clearly state what is being compared and contrasted |
| • conveys a main idea in a thesis statement |
| • is organized logically and effectively |
| • cites appropriate details or passages from the text to support ideas |
| • has been carefully proofread for spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors |

**What Do You Think Now?** After reading these stories, what new idea about wishes and desires do you have? Explain.

## Differentiating Instruction

### English-Language Learners

Students may have difficulty understanding the significance of some of the terms and ideas on the page. Clarify these by going over the following information:

- The outcomes of each story are different from the stories' endings. Outcomes are the results of actions and situations either set up by the characters themselves or by events beyond their control. For example, the outcome of Aunty Misery's wish for no one to be able to climb down from her pear tree without her permission is that Death was trapped in the tree, unable to perform his duties. The story ends with Death resuming his duties and agreeing to let Aunty Misery live.
- Have students list the outcomes and story ending from "The Monkey's Paw" to illustrate this point.
- Comparisons and contrasts include parallel episodes, common literary patterns, and lessons about life, among other things. Remind students that comparison involves looking for similarities in stories while contrasting involves looking for differences between stories.

## Independent Practice

### Writing Focus

**Alternative Prompt for Writers Gaining Proficiency** Students may have difficulty deciding whether to use the Block Method or Point-by-Point Method to organize their essays. To help them decide between the two, have them make two brief outlines, one that lists what elements students would include for the Block Method, and one that lists what elements students would include for the Point-by-Point Method. Students can then choose the method that seems most logical to them.

### What Do You Think Now?

Ask students to consider whether the readings may have influenced the way they now think about wishes. Tell them to look in their **Reader/Writer Notebooks** to review their original thoughts on the question. Have students create a two-column chart with the headings *Before* and *After*. Have them copy their *Before* ideas from their notebooks into the chart and then have them fill in the *After* column.

## Assess

**Collection 1 Resources,** Selection Test, p. 28

**ThinkCentral Online Assessment,** Selection Test

**Teacher One Stop™,** editable Selection Test

## Reteach

**ThinkCentral Online Remediation**