

The Scholarship Jacket

Short Story by Marta Salinas

What stands in the way of your **DREAMS?**

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. **RL 6** Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of characters or narrators in a text.

Your dream may be to go to camp, to be a star on the basketball court, to be class president, or to go to college someday. Whatever it is, hard work and luck can help you fulfill that dream. But, like the narrator of “The Scholarship Jacket,” you may encounter obstacles that block your progress.

QUICKWRITE With a small group of classmates, discuss your dream for the future. What obstacles might you encounter while working to make your dream come true? Then, in your journal, write one or two ways to overcome each obstacle.



Meet the Author

Marta Salinas

born 1949

California Native

Marta Salinas was born in Coalinga, California, and received a degree in creative writing from the University of California at Irvine. “The Scholarship Jacket” is one of several short stories Salinas has published in journals and collections.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Texas History

The main character in “The Scholarship Jacket” is a Mexican-American girl who lives in Texas. The history of *Tejanos*, or Texas Mexicans, dates back more than 200 years. As early as 1731, Tejanos established a ranch community in what was then northeastern Mexico. About 100 years later, Mexico invited immigrants from the United States to settle in the region. The Tejanos and the immigrants eventually joined forces to fight for their independence from Mexico, and in 1845, Texas became part of the United States. Mexicans continued migrating to Texas, but they often faced discrimination. Today, over seven million residents of Texas are Mexican Americans.

● TEXT ANALYSIS: FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

When you listen to a friend talk, you can learn a great deal about him or her. Your friend’s personality, experiences, and opinions all come through. The same is true when you read a story from one character’s point of view. When a story is told from the **first-person point of view**, the narrator

- is a character in the story
- tells the story using the pronouns *I*, *me*, *we*, and *us*
- tells the story as he or she experiences it

As you read “The Scholarship Jacket,” notice how the information you receive is limited to what the narrator sees, hears, thinks, and feels.

■ READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES

One way to get the most out of what you read is to make logical guesses, or **inferences**, about things that are not directly stated. Base your inferences on details in the story and on your own knowledge and experiences. As you read “The Scholarship Jacket,” record each inference you make in an equation like the one shown.

Details from the Text	My Experiences	Inference
Martha couldn't play sports because of cost.	+ I couldn't go to playoffs because of expense.	= Martha's grandparents don't have extra money.

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

These words help tell the story of a girl facing obstacles. Write the word that best completes each sentence.

WORD	agile	dismay	falsify
LIST	despair	eavesdrop	vile

1. She unhappily swallowed the ____ medicine.
2. He would often ____ on his parents' conversations.
3. He tried not to ____ over the terrible news.
4. She climbed the tree in a very ____ manner.
5. There was a look of ____ when she received the news.
6. Don't ____ the records to hide the truth.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Author
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THINK
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KEYWORD: HML7-225



The Scholarship Jacket

Marta Salinas

The small Texas school that I went to had a tradition carried out every year during the eighth-grade graduation: a beautiful gold and green jacket (the school colors) was awarded to the class valedictorian, the student who had maintained the highest grades for eight years. The scholarship jacket had a big gold S on the left front side and your name written in gold letters on the pocket.

My oldest sister, Rosie, had won the jacket a few years back, and I fully expected to also. I was fourteen and in the eighth grade. I had been a straight A student since the first grade and this last year had looked
10 forward very much to owning that jacket. My father was a farm laborer who couldn't earn enough money to feed eight children, so when I was six I was given to my grandparents to raise. We couldn't participate in sports at school because there were registration fees, uniform costs, and trips out of town; so, even though our family was quite **agile** and athletic there would never be a school sports jacket for us. This one, the scholarship jacket, was our only chance. **A**

In May, close to graduation, spring fever had struck as usual with a vengeance.¹ No one paid any attention in class; instead we stared out the windows and at each other, wanting to speed up the last few weeks of

Analyze Visuals ▶

On the basis of the **details** in the painting, how do you think the girl is feeling?

agile (ăj'əl) *adj.* quick and light in movement

A FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Who is the narrator?
What have you learned from her so far?

1. **with a vengeance** (vēn'jəns): to an extreme degree.



ROBERT HENRI

20 school. I **despaired** every time I looked in the mirror. Pencil thin, not
a curve anywhere. I was called “beanpole” and “string bean,” and I knew
that’s what I looked like. A flat chest, no hips, and a brain; that’s what
I had. That really wasn’t much for a fourteen-year-old to work with,
I thought, as I absent-mindedly wandered from my history class to the
gym. Another hour of sweating in basketball and displaying my toothpick
legs was coming up. Then I remembered my P.E. shorts were still in a bag
under my desk where I’d forgotten them. I had to walk all the way back
and get them. Coach Thompson was a real bear if someone wasn’t dressed
for P.E. She had said I was a good forward and even tried to talk Grandma
30 into letting me join the team once. Of course Grandma said no.

despair (dĭ-spâr') v.
to lose hope

Language Coach

Metaphors Writers use metaphors to compare two things without using *like* or *as*. In line 28, “Coach Thompson was a real bear” is a metaphor. How might the coach react to someone who is late?

eavesdrop (ēvz'dröp')
v. to listen secretly to a private conversation of others

falsify (fôl'sə-fī') v. to make false by adding to or changing

I was almost back at my classroom door when I heard voices raised in anger as if in some sort of argument. I stopped. I didn't mean to **eavesdrop**, I just hesitated, not knowing what to do. I needed those shorts and I was going to be late, but I didn't want to interrupt an argument between my teachers. I recognized the voices: Mr. Schmidt, my history teacher, and Mr. Boone, my math teacher. They seemed to be arguing about me. I couldn't believe it. I still remember the feeling of shock that rooted me flat against the wall as if I were trying to blend in with the graffiti written there.

40 “I refuse to do it! I don't care who her father is, her grades don't even begin to compare to Martha's. I won't lie or **falsify** records. Martha has a straight A-plus average and you know it.” That was Mr. Schmidt and he sounded very angry. Mr. Boone's voice sounded calm and quiet.

“Look. Joann's father is not only on the Board, he owns the only store in town: we could say it was a close tie and—”

The pounding in my ears drowned out the rest of the words, only a word here and there filtered through. “. . . Martha is Mexican . . . resign . . . won't do it . . .” Mr. Schmidt came rushing out and luckily for me went down the opposite way toward the auditorium, so he didn't see me.

50 Shaking, I waited a few minutes and then went in and grabbed my bag and fled from the room. Mr. Boone looked up when I came in but didn't say anything. To this day I don't remember if I got in trouble in P.E. for being late or how I made it through the rest of the afternoon. I went home very sad and cried into my pillow that night so Grandmother wouldn't hear me. It seemed a cruel coincidence that I had overheard that conversation. **B**

The next day when the principal called me into his office I knew what it would be about. He looked uncomfortable and unhappy. I decided I wasn't going to make it any easier for him, so I looked him straight in the eyes. He looked away and fidgeted with the papers on his desk. **C**

60 “Martha,” he said, “there's been a change in policy this year regarding the scholarship jacket. As you know, it has always been free.” He cleared

B FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 46–55. How does the argument between Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Boone make Martha feel?

C MAKE INFERENCES

Why is the principal unhappy?

his throat and continued. “This year the Board has decided to charge fifteen dollars, which still won’t cover the complete cost of the jacket.”

I stared at him in shock, and a small sound of **dismay** escaped my throat. I hadn’t expected this. He still avoided looking in my eyes.

“So if you are unable to pay the fifteen dollars for the jacket it will be given to the next one in line.” I didn’t need to ask who that was.

Standing with all the dignity I could muster, I said, “I’ll speak to my grandfather about it, sir, and let you know tomorrow.” I cried on the
70 walk home from the bus stop. The dirt road was a quarter mile from the highway, so by the time I got home, my eyes were red and puffy.

“Where’s Grandpa?” I asked Grandma, looking down at the floor so she wouldn’t ask me why I’d been crying. She was sewing on a quilt as usual and didn’t look up.

“I think he’s out back working in the bean field.”

I went outside and looked out at the fields. There he was. I could see him walking between the rows, his body bent over the little plants, hoe in hand. I walked slowly out to him, trying to think how I could best ask him for the money. There was a cool breeze blowing and a sweet
80 smell of mesquite² fruit in the air, but I didn’t appreciate it. I kicked at a dirt clod. I wanted that jacket so much. It was more than just being a valedictorian and giving a little thank you speech for the jacket on graduation night. It represented eight years of hard work and expectation. I knew I had to be honest with Grandpa; it was my only chance. He saw my shadow and looked up.

He waited for me to speak. I cleared my throat nervously and clasped my hands behind my back so he wouldn’t see them shaking. “Grandpa, I have a big favor to ask you,” I said in Spanish, the only language he knew. He still waited silently. I tried again. “Grandpa, this year the principal
90 said the scholarship jacket is not going to be free. It’s going to cost fifteen dollars, and I have to take the money in tomorrow, otherwise it’ll be given to someone else.” The last words came out in an eager rush. Grandpa straightened up tiredly and leaned his chin on the hoe handle. He looked out over the field that was filled with the tiny green bean plants. I waited, desperately hoping he’d say I could have the money. **D**

He turned to me and asked quietly, “What does a scholarship jacket mean?”

I answered quickly; maybe there was a chance. “It means you’ve earned it by having the highest grades for eight years and that’s why
100 they’re giving it to you.” Too late I realized the significance of my words.

dismay (dĭs-mā’) *n.*
distress caused by trouble or something unexpected

COMMON CORE RL.6

D FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Notice how the author develops the **first-person narration** by drawing in readers, causing them to connect to the narrator and to identify with the conflicts he or she faces. Reread lines 76–95. Based on the first-person narration, what are your own thoughts about Martha as she takes her problem to her grandfather?

2. **sweet smell of mesquite** (mě-skēt’): Mesquite, a small tree or shrub native to hot, dry regions of North America, has small flowers and large super-rich pods that give off a sweet smell.



Portrait of Patience Escalier (1888), Vincent van Gogh. Oil on canvas. Private collection. © Lefevre Fine Art Ltd., London/Bridgeman Art Library.

◀ Analyze Visuals

How does the man shown **compare** with your image of Martha's grandfather?

Grandpa knew that I understood it was not a matter of money. It wasn't that. He went back to hoeing the weeds that sprang up between the delicate little bean plants. It was a time-consuming job; sometimes the small shoots were right next to each other. Finally he spoke again as I turned to leave, crying.

"Then if you pay for it, Marta, it's not a scholarship jacket, is it? Tell your principal I will not pay the fifteen dollars." **E**

I walked back to the house and locked myself in the bathroom for a long time. I was angry with Grandfather even though I knew he was
110 right, and I was angry with the Board, whoever they were. Why did they have to change the rules just when it was my turn to win the jacket? Those were the days of belief and innocence.

It was a very sad and withdrawn girl who dragged into the principal's office the next day. This time he did look me in the eyes.

"What did your grandfather say?"

I sat very straight in my chair.

"He said to tell you he won't pay the fifteen dollars."

The principal muttered something I couldn't understand under his breath and walked over to the window. He stood looking out

E MAKE INFERENCES

Why won't Martha's grandfather pay the money for the jacket?

120 at something outside. He looked bigger than usual when he stood up; he was a tall, gaunt man with gray hair, and I watched the back of his head while I waited for him to speak. **F**

“Why?” he finally asked. “Your grandfather has the money. He owns a two-hundred acre ranch.”

I looked at him, forcing my eyes to stay dry. “I know, sir, but he said if I had to pay for it, then it wouldn’t be a scholarship jacket.” I stood up to leave. “I guess you’ll just have to give it to Joann.” I hadn’t meant to say that, it had just slipped out. I was almost to the door when he stopped me.

“Martha—wait.”

130 I turned and looked at him, waiting. What did he want now? I could feel my heart pounding loudly in my chest and see my blouse fluttering where my breasts should have been. Something bitter and **vile** tasting was coming up in my mouth; I was afraid I was going to be sick. I didn’t need any sympathy speeches. He sighed loudly and went back to his big desk. He watched me, biting his lip.

“Okay. We’ll make an exception in your case. I’ll tell the Board, you’ll get your jacket.” **G**

I could hardly believe my ears. I spoke in a trembling rush. “Oh, thank you, sir!” Suddenly I felt great. I didn’t know about adrenalin³ in those
140 days, but I knew something was pumping through me, making me feel as tall as the sky. I wanted to yell, jump, run the mile, do something. I ran out so I could cry in the hall where there was no one to see me.


At the end of the day, Mr. Schmidt winked at me and said, “I hear you’re getting the scholarship jacket this year.”

His face looked as happy and innocent as a baby’s, but I knew better. Without answering I gave him a quick hug and ran to the bus. I cried on the walk home again, but this time because I was so happy. I couldn’t wait to tell Grandpa and ran straight to the field. I joined him in the row where he was working, and without saying anything I crouched down and
150 started pulling up the weeds with my hands. Grandpa worked alongside me for a few minutes, and he didn’t ask what had happened. After I had a little pile of weeds between the rows, I stood up and faced him.

“The principal said he’s making an exception for me, Grandpa, and I’m getting the jacket after all. That’s after I told him what you said.”

Grandpa didn’t say anything; he just gave me a pat on the shoulder and a smile. He pulled out the crumpled red handkerchief that he always carried in his back pocket and wiped the sweat off his forehead.

“Better go see if your grandmother needs any help with supper.”

I gave him a big grin. He didn’t fool me. I skipped and ran back
160 to the house whistling some silly tune. 

F FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Reread lines 118–122.

How does the first-person point of view limit your understanding of what the principal is thinking?

vile (vīl) *adj.* disgusting; unpleasant

G MAKE INFERENCES

Why do you think the principal changed his mind?

Language Coach

Word Definitions Find the phrase *making an exception* in line 153. The word *exception* means “an exclusion or a leaving out.” In your own words, explain what the principal is doing for Martha.

3. **adrenalin** (ə-drĕn’ē-līn): a hormone that speeds up the heartbeat and increases bodily energy. The body produces adrenalin when a person experiences emotions such as excitement or fear.

Comprehension

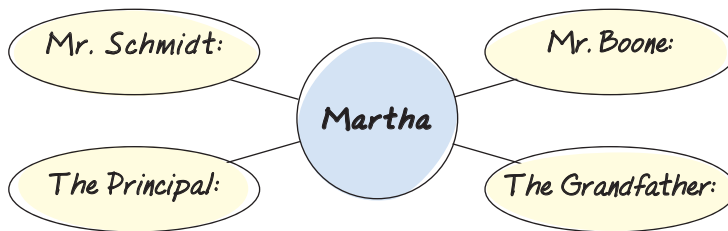
- Recall** Why does Martha call the scholarship jacket “our only chance”?
- Clarify** What do Mr. Boone and Mr. Schmidt argue about?
- Summarize** Tell why the scholarship jacket is so important to Martha. Cite evidence from the story.



RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. **RL 6** Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of characters or narrators in a text.

Text Analysis

- Make Inferences** Review the inferences that you recorded in equations. Have any of your inferences changed after reading the story? If so, write a revised inference next to the equation. Explain your reasons.
- Interpret** Reread lines 47–48. During the teachers’ argument, one of the teachers says, “Martha is Mexican.” What could he mean by this?
- Analyze Character** Martha is the main character in the story. Use a web to describe how the minor characters interact with Martha and what effect they have on the story.



- Draw Conclusions** Martha’s grandfather says little, but his words and actions mean much to Martha. What does Martha learn from him? Explain how you came to this conclusion.
- Contrast Points of View** The story of “The Scholarship Jacket” is told from the first-person point of view. Think about how the story might change if you knew everyone’s thoughts and feelings. In what ways would the story be different? Would such a change affect the overall theme? Explain.

Extension and Challenge

- Speech** Write a thank-you speech for Martha to give when she receives her scholarship jacket. In the speech, mention the challenges Martha had to overcome in order to achieve this award.

What stands in the way of your DREAMS?

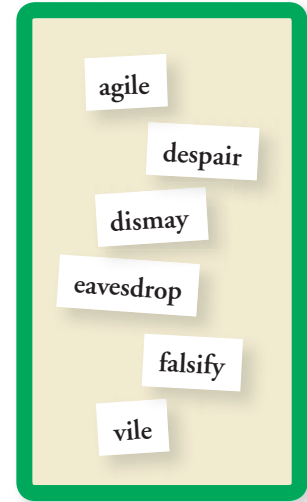
Review the list of obstacles you devised for the **QUICKWRITE** on page 224. Were any of the obstacles as difficult as the one Martha faced? Explain.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Answer each question to show your understanding of the vocabulary words.

1. Which is a way to **falsify**—forging a signature or correcting an error?
2. Would an **agile** person be more likely to sing well or run quickly?
3. If I began to **despair**, would I more likely mingle with others or keep to myself?
4. Which is the more **vile** material—rotting garbage or rose petals?
5. Would losing one’s glasses or having lunch with friends more likely cause **dismay**?
6. If you were going to **eavesdrop**, would you talk on the phone or listen behind a door?



ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• analyze • aware • develop • react • respond

In “The Scholarship Jacket,” a minor character experiences a change. In a brief paragraph, **analyze** the principal. Describe what the story reveals about his appearance and actions. Use at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words in your description.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: CONTEXT CLUES

Sometimes writers tell you directly what difficult words mean. This kind of context clue, a **definition**, usually follows the difficult word. It is set off by commas or dashes or by expressions like *that is*. Look for a definition of *valedictorian* on page 226 of this story.

PRACTICE Define the boldfaced words. Identify context clues that helped you understand the meaning of the word.

1. Loretta is a **polyglot**—that is, someone who knows several languages.
2. The hurricane began as an **amorphous** mass—a shapeless group of clouds.
3. When I **disparaged** him, he put me down in the same way.
4. She was not simply happy to receive the gift; she was **euphoric**.
5. The sleep clinic treats **somnambulists**, people who walk in their sleep.

COMMON CORE

L 4a Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central

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