

A Day of Change: Developing the Story

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What can you infer about the conflict of the story? How is it both internal and external?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

How does Cisneros show the transition from one event to another?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What is the effect of a sentence that repeats short phrases such as “Not mine, not mine, not mine?” How does this sentence type help develop the story?

5 Only today I wish I didn't have only eleven years rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box. Today I wish I was one hundred and two instead of eleven because if I was one hundred and two I'd have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk. I would've known how to tell her it wasn't mine instead of just sitting there with that look on my face and nothing coming out of my mouth.

6 “Whose is this?” Mrs. Price says, and she holds the red sweater up in the air for all the class to see. “Whose? It's been sitting in the coatroom for a month.”

7 “Not mine,” says everybody. “Not me.”

8 “It has to belong to somebody,” Mrs. Price keeps saying, but nobody can remember. It's an ugly sweater with red plastic buttons and a collar and sleeves all stretched out like you could use it for a jump rope. It's maybe a thousand years old and even if it belonged to me I wouldn't say so.

9 Maybe because I'm skinny, maybe because she doesn't like me, that stupid Sylvia Saldívar says, “I think it belongs to Rachel.” An ugly sweater like that, all raggedy and old, but Mrs. Price believes her. Mrs. Price takes the sweater and puts it right on my desk, but when I open my mouth nothing comes out.

10 “That's not, I don't, you're not . . . Not mine,” I finally say in a little voice that was maybe me when I was four.

11 “Of course it's yours,” Mrs. Price says. “I remember you wearing it once.” Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not.

12 Not mine, not mine, not mine, but Mrs. Price is already turning to page thirty-two, and math problem number four. I don't know why but all of a sudden I'm feeling sick inside, like the part of me that's three wants to come out of my eyes, only I squeeze them shut tight and bite down on my teeth real hard and try to remember today I am eleven, eleven. Mama is making a cake for me for tonight, and when Papa comes home everybody will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to you.

13 But when the sick feeling goes away and I open my eyes, the red sweater's still sitting there like a big red mountain. I move the red sweater to the corner of my desk with my ruler. I move my pencil and books and eraser as far from it as possible. I even move my chair a little to the right. Not mine, not mine, not mine.

14 In my head I'm thinking how long till lunchtime, how long till I can take the red sweater and throw it over the schoolyard fence, or leave it hanging on a parking meter, or bunch it up into a little ball and toss it in the alley. Except when math period ends, Mrs. Price says loud and in front of everybody, “Now, Rachel, that's enough,” because she sees I've shoved the red sweater to the tippy-tip corner of my desk and it's hanging all over the edge like a waterfall, but I don't care.

15 “Rachel,” Mrs. Price says. She says it like she's getting mad. “You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense.”

16 “But it's not—”

17 “Now!” Mrs. Price says.

18 This is when I wish I wasn't eleven, because all the years inside of me—ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one—are pushing at the back of my eyes when I put one arm through one sleeve of the sweater that smells like cottage cheese, and then the other arm through the other and stand there with my arms apart like if the sweater hurts me and it does, all itchy and full of germs that aren't even mine.

