

Session 1, Reading Selection #1

Jesús Colón discusses a job that he thought would be a wonderful opportunity for him. Read the story below. Use information from the story to answer the questions that follow.

Easy Job, Good Wages

by Jesús Colón

- 1 This happened early in 1919. We were both out of work, my brother and I. He got up earlier to look for a job. When I woke up, he was already gone. So I dressed, went out and bought a copy of the *New York World* and turned its pages until I got to the “Help Wanted Unskilled” section of the paper. After much reading and re-reading the same columns, my attention was held by a small advertisement. It read: “Easy job. Good wages. No experience necessary.” This was followed by a number and street on the west side of lower Manhattan. It sounded like the job I was looking for. Easy job. Good wages. Those four words revolved in my brain as I was travelling toward the address indicated in the advertisement. Easy job. Good wages. Easy job. Good wages. Easy . . .
- 2 The place consisted of a small front office and a large loft on the floor of which I noticed a series of large galvanized tubs half filled with water out of which I noticed protruding the necks of many bottles of various sizes and shapes. Around these tubs there were a number of workers, male and female, sitting on small wooden benches. All had their hands in the water of the tub, the left hand holding a bottle and with the thumb nail of the right hand scratching the labels.
- 3 The foreman found a vacant stool for me around one of the tubs of water. I asked why a penknife or a small safety razor could not be used instead of the thumb nail to take off the old labels from the bottles. I was expertly informed that knives or razors would scratch the glass thus depreciating the value of the bottles when they were to be sold.
- 4 I sat down and started to use my thumb nail on one bottle. The water had somewhat softened the transparent mucilage used to attach the label to the bottle. But the softening did not work out uniformly somehow. There were always pieces of label that for some obscure reason remained affixed to the bottles. It was on those pieces of labels tenaciously fastened to the bottles that my right hand thumb nail had to work overtime. As the minutes passed I noticed that the coldness of the water started to pass from my hand to my body giving me intermittent body shivers that I tried to conceal with the greatest of effort from those sitting beside me. My hands became deadly clean and tiny little wrinkles started to show especially at the tip of my fingers. Sometimes I stopped a few seconds from scratching the bottles, to open and close my fists in rapid movements in order to bring blood to my hands. But almost as soon as I placed them in the water they became deathly pale again.
- 5 But these were minor details compared with what was happening to the thumb of my right hand. From a delicate, boyish thumb, it was growing by the minute into a full blown tomato colored finger. It was the only part of my right hand remaining blood red. I started to look at the workers’ thumbs. I noticed that these particular fingers on their right hands were unusually

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developed with a thick layer of corn-like surface at the top of their right thumb. The nails on their thumbs looked coarser and smaller than on the other fingers—thumb and nail having become one and the same thing—a primitive unnatural human instrument especially developed to detach hard pieces of labels from wet bottles immersed in galvanized tubs.

- 6 After a couple of hours I had a feeling that my thumb nail was going to leave my finger and jump into the cold water in the tub. A numb pain imperceptibly began to be felt coming from my right thumb. Then I began to feel such pain as if coming from a finger bigger than all of my body.
- 7 After three hours of this I decided to quit fast. I told the foreman so, showing him my swollen finger. He figured I had earned 69 cents at 23 cents an hour.
- 8 Early in the evening I met my brother in our furnished room. We started to exchange experiences of our job hunting for the day. “You know what?” my brother started, “early in the morning I went to work where they take labels off old bottles—with your right hand thumb nail . . . Somewhere on the West Side of Lower Manhattan. I only stayed a couple of hours. ‘Easy job . . . Good wages’ . . . they said. The person who wrote that ad must have had a great sense of humor.” And we both had a hearty laugh that evening when I told my brother that I also went to work at that same place later in the day.
- 9 Now when I see ads reading, “Easy job. Good wages,” I just smile an ancient, tired, knowing smile.

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Session 1, Multiple-Choice Questions

- 1 Turning pages until he gets to the “Help Wanted Unskilled” section suggests the narrator
- A. has few job qualifications.
 - B. is a high school dropout.
 - C. was fired from his last job.
 - D. is not interested in working.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 1: Literature/Learning Standard 13

- 2 In paragraph 1, the narrator’s repetition of “Easy job. Good wages.” emphasizes that he was
- A. aware of what was about to happen to him.
 - B. daydreaming about his job experience.
 - C. convinced he had found the perfect job.
 - D. trying to persuade himself to go to work.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 2: Literature/Learning Standard 13

- 3 The workers could not use a penknife or a safety razor to scrape the bottles because
- A. the foreman was concerned about the workers’ well-being.
 - B. it would slow down the process of scraping labels.
 - C. the surface of the bottles could be damaged.
 - D. it would prevent the labels from coming off in one piece.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 3: Literature/Learning Standard 9

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- 4 In paragraph 5, when the narrator notices the other workers' thumbs, he
- A. asks for an increase in wages.
 - B. realizes the true cost of the job.
 - C. requests a penknife for peeling the labels.
 - D. complains to the foreman about working conditions.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 4: Literature/Learning Standard 13

- 5 In paragraph 6, "my thumb nail was going to leave my finger and jump into the cold water in the tub" is an example of
- A. onomatopoeia.
 - B. flashback.
 - C. allusion.
 - D. personification.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 5: Literature/Learning Standard 13

- 6 In the last sentence, what does the narrator mean when he states, "I just smile an ancient, tired, knowing smile"?
- A. His smile is like his grandfather's.
 - B. He is happy about his brother's job.
 - C. He knows he will find better work.
 - D. He has learned an age-old truth.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 6: Literature/Learning Standard 13

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- 7 In paragraph 4, the word *tenaciously* **most nearly** means
- A. stubbornly.
 - B. invisibly.
 - C. quickly.
 - D. sloppily.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 7: *Literature/Learning Standard 8*

Read the sentence in the box below.

The foreman found a vacant stool for me around one of the tubs of water.

- 8 In the sentence above, the word *around* is used as a
- A. noun.
 - B. verb.
 - C. preposition.
 - D. conjunction.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 8: *Language/Learning Standard 5*

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Session 1, Open-Response Question

- 9 How does the meaning of the expression, “Easy job. Good wages,” change for the author from the beginning of the story to the end? Use information from the story to support your answer.

Reporting Category/Learning Standard for Item 9: Literature/Learning Standard 13