



What does this question suggest about Grayson's personality?

A. It suggests that he is a person who is interested in confronting life, one who welcomes challenge and diversity.



Why does the speaker enjoy surprising Horace?

A. The speaker likes to stir up "new thoughts" in Horace, and surprising him elicits this reaction.



Why does Horace believe he is superior to his neighbor?

A. Horace is a better farmer and believes this makes him superior to Grayson.

The author of this statement feels that he attains immortality while he is still alive, because he recognizes the riches of nature that are available for his enjoyment.

Why does the speaker enjoy surprising Horace?

What does this question suggest about Grayson's personality?

Why does Horace believe he is superior to his neighbor?

Great Possessions

David Grayson

FOCUS: CHARACTERIZATION

"I am made immortal by apprehending* my possession of incorruptible goods."

I have just had one of the pleasant experiences of life. From time to time, these brisk winter days, I like to walk across the fields to Horace's farm. I take a new way each time and make nothing of the snow in the fields or the drifts along the fences

"Why," asks Harriet, "do you insist on struggling through the snow when there's a good beaten road around?"

"Harriet," I said, "Why should anyone take a beaten road when there are new and adventurous ways to travel?"

When I cross the fields I never know at what moment I may come upon some strange or surprising experience, what new sights I may see, what new sounds I may hear, and I have the further great advantage of appearing unexpectedly at Horace's farm. Sometimes I enter by the cow lane, sometimes by way of the old road through the wood lot, or I appear casually, like a gust of wind, around the

corner of the barn, or I let Horace discover me leaning with folded arms upon his cattle fence. I have come to love doing this, for unexpectedness in visitors, as in religion and politics, is disturbing to Horace and, as sand grits in oysters produce pearls, my unexpected appearances have more than once astonished new thoughts in Horace, or yielded pearly bits of native* humor.

Ever since I have known him, Horace has been rather high-and-mighty with me; but I know he enjoys my visits, for I give him always, I think, a pleasantly renewed sense of his own superiority. When he sees me his eye lights up with the comfortable knowledge that he can plow so much better than I can, that his corn grows taller than mine, and his hens lay more eggs. He is a wonderfully practical man, is Horace; hard-headed, they call it here. And he never feels so superior, I think, as when he finds me sometimes of a Sunday or an evening walking across the fields where my land joins his,

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

apprehending — here, be aware of and appreciate.

native — here, rustic.

1 Students may recognize this sentiment echoed in Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken." Grayson, too, chooses the distinctly different life of a writer, a fact that is significant to the story, and will emerge as the narrative unfolds.

2 Point out to students how Grayson extends his comparison "as sand grits in oysters ..." with the phrase "pearly bits of native humor."

or sitting on a stone fence, or lying on my back in the pasture under a certain friendly thorn-apple tree. This he finds it difficult to understand, and thinks it highly undisciplined, impractical, no doubt *reprehensible*.

One incident of the sort I shall never forget. It was on a June day only a year or so after I came here, and before Horace knew me as well as he does now. I had climbed the hill to look off across his own high-field pasture, where the white daisies, the purple fleabane,* and the but-tercups made a wild tangle of beauty among the tall herd's-grass.* Light airs moved *billowing* across the field, bobolinks* and meadow larks were singing, and all about were the old fences, each with its wild hedgerow of choke cherry, young elms, and black raspberry bushes, and beyond, across miles and miles of sunny green countryside, the mysterious blue of the ever changing hills. It was a spot I loved then, and have loved more deeply every year since.

Horace found me sitting on the stone fence which there divides our possessions; I think he had been observing me with amusement for some time before I saw him, for when I looked around his face wore a comfortably superior, half-disdainful* smile.

"David," said he, "what ye doin' here?"

"Harvesting my crops," I said.

He looked at me sharply to see if I was joking, but I was perfectly *sober*.

"Harvestin' yer crops?"

"Yes," I said, the fancy* growing suddenly upon me, "and just now I've been taking a crop from the field you think you own."

I waved my hand to indicate his high-field pasture.

"Don't I own it?"

"No, Horace, I'm sorry to say, not all of it. To be *frank* with you, since I came here, I've quietly acquired an undivided interest in that land. I may as well tell you first as last. I'm like you, Horace, I'm reaching out in all directions."

I spoke in as serious a voice as I could command: the tone I use when I sell potatoes. Horace's smile wholly disappeared. A city feller like me was capable of anything!

"How's that?" he exclaimed sharply. "What do you mean? That field came down to me from my Grandfather Jamieson."

I continued to look at Horace with great calmness and *gravity*.

"Judging from what I now know of your title,* Horace," said I, "neither your Grandfather Jamieson nor your father ever owned all of that field. And I've now acquired that part of it, in fee simple,* that neither they nor you ever really had."

At this, Horace began to look seriously worried. The idea that anyone could get away from him anything that he possessed, especially without his knowledge, was terrible to him.

"What do you mean, Mr. Grayson?"

He had been calling me "David," but he now returned sharply to "Mister." In our country when we "Mister" a friend some-

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

fleabane — a thick-stemmed flower whose scent is reputed to repel fleas and other insects.

herd's-grass — grass used for hay or pasture.

bobolinks — songbirds, members of the blackbird family.

disdainful — scornful.

fancy — here, a whimsical idea.

title — legal right of ownership.

fee simple — absolute ownership.



Why does Horace feel smug?

A. Horace believes that his neighbor is idling away his time, while Horace has been engaged in more "profitable" pursuits.



Why has Horace become unfriendly?

A. He thinks his neighbor is secretly trying to take possession of part of Horace's field.



Why has Horace become unfriendly?



Why does Horace feel smug?

3 Be sure that students understand that Horace will take Grayson's statement literally, and will think that David has become ambitious and is after Horace's field. It should be noted that Grayson means something else, evident from the phrase "the fancy growing suddenly upon me."

4 Horace is preparing for conflict.