

# The element of style of maira kalman

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of the of the English Submitted The Elements of Style Essay Maira Kalman is well regarded as an essayist, illustrator and social activist. She had created memorable illustrations not only for newspapers but written and illustrated a dozen children's books as well. This is presumably her first attempt at illustrating for something as serious as a grammar book.

Kalman's illustrations and paintings are cleverly interspersed at different points in the book to convey meaning and make the reader think, or otherwise just relax. The paintings on page 36 are a case in point. There are three illustrations, one each labeled with the words ' Could', ' Should' and ' Would' respectively. Kalman seems to be an expert on body language since these illustrations clearly have meanings and stories attached to them. If a picture can tell a thousand words, then Kalman's paintings certainly qualify to prove this adage. One may well connect each painting to the word it is used to illustrate. For instance, the word ' should' may also be used in the sense of a moral imperative, as for example what should be done in such and such a situation. Should imposes this moral duty, (as " one should be kind to the poor"); Could means that it's the person's choice whether to act or not; (" he could have reacted sooner and saved the child's life); and Would indicates that it is highly probable that the person will act in such a manner (" he wouldn't be such a spoilsport now, would he?"). ' Would' is illustrated by Kalman as a man who is relaxed but looking at us keenly and ready to move into action. His body language states that he is ready to get up. But the very fact that he is seated on a chair and near a bed gives one the idea that if he is not motivated to take action, he just might decide to get off his chair and move to relax and lit down on the bed nearby. Something

might motivate him to take action, and then again, it might not. The choice is entirely up to him, it would appear so. On the other hand, 'Should' is illustrated by the painting of a quaint maiden who sits with her hands folded at her chest in a sitting position. She looks at us out of the corner of her eyes- a sideways glance (Strunk, White & Kalman, 2007, 36). This may refer to the old archaic origins of the word and its usage. She is dressed in red. For some reason, it indicates to me that she should get married as she seems to be a spinster. Although the woman is the focus of the picture, we cannot help noticing the painting of flowers or leaves behind her. The third illustration or painting is that of a young bespectacled man in a waistcoat and suit with a bowtie, hands similarly folded while in sitting position on a chair, representing 'Could' and indicating that the man might do a certain action if he so desired. He is very composed and it is entirely up to him to act or not (Strunk, White & Kalman, 2007, 36). For some reason, there seems to be an inherent dissatisfaction with life in general as all the three characters seem yearning for something worthwhile to do. While the gentleman in the painting labeled 'Would' certainly seems to be the most motivated of the three, the others seem content to just lie in wait for something better to happen, or let life pass them by.

Thus we have seen that through her paintings and illustrations, Kalman has not only managed to enlighten us but also give additional meaning to the book and its worth.

#### Works Cited

Strunk, William; White, E. B and Kalman, Maira. *The Elements of Style*, Illustrated edition, Penguin Non Classics, 2007, 176 pages.